

A Battle for Righteousness: Jimmy Carter and Religious Nationalism

by

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ABSTRACT

Time magazine called 1976 "the year of the evangelical" partly in response to the rapid political ascent of the previously little-known Georgia governor Jimmy Carter. A Sunday school teacher and deacon in his local church, Carter emphasized the important role of faith in his life in a way that no presidential candidate had done in recent memory. However, scholarly assessments of Carter's foreign policy have primarily focused on his management style or the bureaucratic politics in his administration. This study adds to the growing literature in American diplomatic history analyzing religion and foreign policy by focusing on how Carter's Christian beliefs and worldview shaped his policymaking and how his religious convictions affected his advisors. To better demonstrate this connection, this dissertation primarily discusses Carter's foreign policy vis-à-vis religious nationalist groups of the three Abrahamic faiths (Judaism, Christianity, Islam).

By drawing on archival materials from the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library, Carter's own voluminous writings, and memoirs of other administration officials, this dissertation argues that Carter's religious values factored into policymaking decisions, although sometimes in a subtle fashion due to his strong Baptist doctrinal commitment to the separation of church and state. Moreover, Carter's initial success in using his religious beliefs in the Camp David negotiations raised expectations among administration officials and others when crises arose, such as the hostage taking in Iran and the electoral threat of the Christian Right. Despite his success at Camp David, invoking religious values can complicate situations already fraught with sacred symbolism. Ultimately, this dissertation points to the benefits and limits of foreign policy shaped by a president with

strong public religious convictions as well as the advantages and pitfalls of scholars examining the impact of religion on presidential decision making.

DEDICATION

To Hassell and Eunice Lovell, my travel companions on my first trip to Plains and the
best grandparents a person could ask for

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My maternal grandparents are “yellow dog” Democrats from rural Middle Tennessee. Of all the Democrats they supported, my grandparents held a special place in their heart for our 39th President, Jimmy Carter. Perhaps they related to Carter by growing up in a small, rural town like Plains, Georgia in the Depression years. Maybe they found common ground in the similarity of their faiths, Carter as a committed Southern Baptist and my grandparents as longtime members of the Churches of Christ. In conversations around the dinner table, my grandmother would repeat a common sentiment that some hold about Carter, “He was too good a man to be president.” My grandparents’ love of President Carter seemed interesting to me because my understanding of him did not really extend beyond the hostage crisis, long gas lines, stagflation, and teaching Sunday School.

In March 2006, I took my grandparents on a trip to Plains, Georgia for my grandfather’s eightieth birthday to hear Carter teach Sunday school and visit a number of other Carter-related sites. This trip ignited my interest in Carter and his presidency, ultimately resulting in this dissertation.

Many people have assisted me as this project developed over time. First and foremost, I must thank Kyle Longley, my advisor, who always offered sage advice about my research and told great stories when we compared our upbringings, mine in Tennessee and his in Texas. I would like to thank Catherine O’Donnell and April Summitt, the other members of my committee, for their insightful, thought-provoking, and encouraging feedback. A number of faculty members at Arizona State University directly or indirectly influenced the course of this dissertation, especially Lynn Stoner,

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In an unexpected turn of events in summer 2009, I became the interim minister for the church I attended because our preacher suddenly passed away. The members of Tempe Church of Christ deserve a tremendous amount of my gratitude for their faith in me and their tolerance of the large number of Jimmy Carter anecdotes I used in sermons. I would like to express my deepest appreciation to Steve Tyree and Diane Jensen, my two co-workers at church, for their support of my research and writing.

On a more personal level, I want to thank my parents, Jerry and Janet, for their perpetual encouragement in my academic endeavors. I owe special appreciation to my wife, Renae, for enduring my late nights at the office and being patient with my frustration. Throughout the entire process, she kept me grounded in what's important.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

| CHAPTER | Page |
|--|------|
| 1 INTRODUCTION | 1 |
| 2 THE FAITH OF JIMMY CARTER: A BACKGROUND..... | 13 |
| 3 "SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES": JIMMY CARTER'S QUEST TO FIND MIDDLE EAST PEACE..... | 38 |
| 4 "THOSE WHO ARE SLOW TO ANGER CALM CONTENTION": JIMMY CARTER AND THE EMERGENCE OF KHOMEINI'S IRAN | 89 |
| 5 "MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED FOR A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE": JIMMY CARTER AND SUPPORTING THE AFGHAN MUJAHIDIN | 137 |
| 6 "A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR": JIMMY CARTER AND THE RISE OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT..... | 180 |
| 7 "BLESSED IS THE PEACEMAKER": JIMMY CARTER'S CONTINUED ENTANGLEMENT IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT | 231 |
| 8 CONCLUSION..... | 280 |
| References | 286 |

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

James Wall, editor of *Christian Century* and an avid supporter of President Jimmy Carter, once explained, “The president’s homilies, personal illustrations, and biblical allusions present the simple faith of a complex public man, but they provide no magical connection between a specific political decision and the president’s personal faith.”¹ Wall’s observation illustrates the difficulty of assessing the importance of religion or other cultural factors in the decision-making calculus of Carter or any other leader.

Although Carter possessed an abiding belief in the separation of church and state, he did not relegate his personal faith to the private sphere of his life. During the 1976 campaign, Carter remarked, “My religion is as natural to me as breathing.”² Dan Ariail, Carter’s longtime pastor at Maranatha Baptist Church, clarified: “There has been an almost universal reading of Jimmy Carter’s faith as being a department of his life, an addendum with little relationship to the rest of him. But I have discovered that you can never adequately grasp Jimmy Carter himself unless you see his Christian faith, along with its standards and principles, as being the framework on which all the rest is built.”³

Paradoxically, Carter’s faith seemed at the root of his political decision making, but very separate from his policymaking at the same time. On one occasion, he declared, “I try to utilize my own religious beliefs as a constant guide in making decisions as a

¹ James M. Wall, “Words of Faith from Jimmy Carter,” *Christian Century*, January 17, 1979, 38.

² As cited in Howard Norton and Bob Slosser, *The Miracle of Jimmy Carter* (Plainfield: Logos International, 1976), 11.

³ Dan Ariail and Cheryl Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter’s Apprentice: The Spiritual Biography of Jimmy Carter* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 46.

private or public citizen.”⁴ Later, he recalled how much his faith sustained him during his time in office, “I prayed more during those four years than at any other time in my life, just asking for God’s guidance in making the right decisions on behalf of the American people.”⁵

Many others recognized the depth of Carter’s religious convictions and how they influenced his political outlook. Pope John Paul II declared, “You know, after a couple of hours with President Carter I had the feeling that two religious leaders were conversing.”⁶ Press Secretary Jody Powell recollected, “I think almost everything he did was in a major way affected by his religious faith, because I think it is such an integral part of who he is and his view of life.”⁷

During his presidency, Carter often invoked his own religious values to find areas for compromise among people of faith. Sometimes these expressions of faith succeeded in achieving their goals, such as finding a common ground for peace between Israel and Egypt. However, on other occasions, Carter’s use of religious language and symbolism backfired. When Carter used such language, he opened himself up to considerable criticism from not only the secular community, but also religious nationalists who had more rigid or literal understandings of doctrine than he did. Carter’s conflict with the Christian Right exemplified this problem.

⁴ As cited in Peter Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 178-179.

⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Living Faith*, (New York: Times Books, 1996), 97.

⁶ As cited in Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1983), 27.

⁷ Richard G. Hutcheson Jr., *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1988), 115-116.

Carter's success in negotiating the Camp David Accords and selectively using religious rhetoric to achieve his goals raised expectations among many people about how the president would later react to crises with religious overtones. On several occasions, some world leaders and administration officials shared the pope's perception of Carter as a religious leader rather than just a political leader. Thus, they overestimated his ability to reach religious audiences, as when one advisor recommended that Carter plead with Ayatollah Khomeini to release the American hostages held in Iran on religious grounds. Some of Carter's staff even miscalculated how well he understood the emergence of the global religious nationalist phenomenon, assuming Carter's personal devotion to Christianity could help him understand Islamic revivalist movements.

The impact of Carter's religion on his foreign policymaking often seemed subtle because of his diligence in guarding the line of separation between church and state. Religious scholar Richard Hutcheson wryly observed, "A day in the Carter Oval Office in no way resembled a prayer meeting."⁸ He further explained: "Carter did not govern by revelation. He did not govern by seeking out appropriate passages in the Bible to cite as proof texts. He did not govern on the basis of authoritative rulings by the church—Southern Baptist or any other church."⁹

This work will address three interrelated questions about Carter and how his faith affected policymaking in situations involving religious nationalism. This study is primarily concerned with foreign policy because as political scientist Gary Scott Smith explained, "The philosophical commitments of a president can be seen most clearly in his

⁸ Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 134.

⁹ Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 117-118.

foreign policy because it involves fewer constraints and greater latitude than domestic matters.”¹⁰

First, how did Carter’s religious values influence his decision-making and rhetoric in foreign policy toward religious nationalists, both during and after his presidency? Carter’s decision-making calculus included considerations of elements such as national security, geopolitical strategy, economics, and domestic politics, so religion alone never drove any decision. Thus, the more important question is how and to what extent did Carter’s religious convictions affect policymaking?

Second, how did Carter’s advisors’ understanding of the president’s faith affect their policy recommendations? Although presidents face fewer constraints in making foreign policy than in domestic policy, a wide range of regional experts, bureaucrats, diplomats, military officers, businessmen, and other interest groups shape the making of foreign policy. For instance, National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski, an anti-Soviet hawk and international relations scholar who privileged geopolitical strategy over other concerns, possessed a significant amount of influence over Carter’s foreign policy thinking, especially by the end of his term. Thus, an individual president’s religious convictions or philosophical commitments would not be entirely unfiltered by other actors.

Finally, what were the consequences of Carter invoking his faith or others understanding Carter’s actions in religious terms in conflicts with religious nationalist implications? Invoking religion can complicate already complex situations (such as

¹⁰ Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 315.

Middle East peace talks) or escalate conflicts between secular groups and religious groups (such as the evolution of the Afghan mujahidin).

Sociologist Mark Juergensmeyer introduced the concept of religious nationalism to explain many of the conflicts in the post-Cold War world. He argued that the term “fundamentalism” was too imprecise because it was not cross-cultural enough due to its roots in conservative Protestantism and because it typically referred to religious movements not motivated by political conditions. Instead, Juergensmeyer offered the term “religious nationalism” as a substitute for fundamentalism because it fit the more explicitly political religious movements he studied.

According to Juergensmeyer, religious nationalists emerged in the late 20th century due to their dissatisfaction with the promises of progress through secular modernization, best exemplified by Western capitalism and Soviet communism. Rather than supporting a morally bankrupt secular state, religious nationalists looked to faith as the foundation of their nationalist feelings because the timeline for progress became eternal rather than temporal and earthly setbacks became just part of a larger context of cosmic warfare.

Despite their frustration with secular nationalism, Juergensmeyer explained that religious nationalists still embraced the modern structures of the state, but altered the basis of its existence. Rather than the state deriving its power from social contract theory, religious nationalists framed the origins of the power of the state in terms of God’s will.¹¹

¹¹ Mark Juergensmeyer, *The New Cold War? Religious Nationalism Confronts the Secular State* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 4-8. For a broad overview of the arguments over defining nationalism, see Jonathan Hearn, *Rethinking Nationalism: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006) and Umut Ozkirimli, *Theories of Nationalism: A Critical Introduction*, second edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010). For specific arguments about the varying origins of nationalism,

Carter faced a host of situations involving religious nationalist movements including the religious parties of the Likud coalition in Israel, Khomeini's Islamic Republic in Iran, the Islamist fighters of the Afghan mujahidin, the Christian Right movement in the United States, and Hamas in the Palestinian territories.

Although sociologists and political scientists had studied the impact of religion on international relations and social movements for some time, the consideration of religion as a key variable in the history of American foreign relations only recently emerged.¹² Historian Andrew Preston speculated diplomatic historians underplayed religion until very recently because they feared the partisan and sectarian implications of discussing religion and questioned the methodological usefulness of assigning religion a role of causation in foreign policy decision making.¹³ Historian Leo Ribuffo echoed concerns of

see Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (New York: Verso, 1983) pointed to print culture as the source of nationalism; Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1983) defined the transition to industrial society as the cause of nationalism; Anthony D. Smith, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations* (Malden: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 1986) identified historic ethnic communities as the root of nationalism. For discussions of the political implications of religious fundamentalist or revivalist movements, see Reza Aslan, *Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Random House, 2010); N.J. Demerath III, *Crossing the Gods: World Religions and Worldly Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Mark Juergensmeyer, *Global Rebellion: Religious Challenges to the Secular State, from Christian Militias to al Qaeda* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008); Gilles Kepel, *The Revenge of God: The Resurgence of Islam, Christianity and Judaism in the Modern World* (University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994); Bruce B. Lawrence, *Defenders of God: The Fundamentalist Revolt Against the Modern Age* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995); and Malise Ruthven, *Fundamentalism: The Search for Meaning* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009).

¹² See Andrew Rotter, "Christians, Muslims, and Hindus: Religion and US-South Asian Relations, 1947-1954," *Diplomatic History* 24:4 (Fall 2000): 593-613. Rotter's article was the basis for a series of responses about the use of religion as an analytical tool in diplomatic history, ranging from the pessimistic, Robert Buzzanco, "Commentary: Where's the Beef? Culture without Power in the Study of US Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 24:4 (Fall 2000): 623-632 and Patricia R. Hill, "Commentary: Religion as a Category of Diplomatic Analysis," *Diplomatic History* 24:4 (Fall 2000): 633-640 to the more optimistic, Robert Dean, "Commentary: Tradition, Cause and Effect, and the Cultural History of International Relations," *Diplomatic History* 24:4 (Fall 2000): 615-622.

¹³ See Andrew Preston, "Bridging the Gap between the Sacred and the Secular in the History of American Foreign Relations," *Diplomatic History* 30:5 (November 2006): 783-812.

the latter sentiment, “although religious interest groups at home and religious issues abroad have affected foreign policy, no major diplomatic decision has turned on religious issues alone.”¹⁴ However, since 2000, historians of American foreign relations have increasingly examined religion in their work on a wide range of topics and eras as cultural explorations of foreign relations focused on race and gender gained more prominence in the field.¹⁵

Even as scholarly output linking religion with American diplomatic history increased, none of that work focused on Carter’s presidency, a curious development given Carter’s deep Christian faith. However, students in other disciplines had devoted some attention to the topic. In the mid-1980s, a pair of theology graduate students at Baptist seminaries wrote dissertations using Carter’s public speeches to demonstrate the

¹⁴ Leo P. Ribuffo, “Religion in the History of US Foreign Policy,” in *The Influence of Faith: Religious Groups and US Foreign Policy*, ed. Elliott Abrams (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2001), 21.

¹⁵ Works exemplifying this literature incorporating religion into the history of American foreign relations include Andrew Rotter, *Comrades at Odds: The United States and India 1947-1964* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000); Seth Jacobs, *America’s Miracle Man in Vietnam: Religion, Race, and US Intervention in Southeast Asia 1950-1957* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004); Matthew F. Jacobs, “The Perils and Promise of Islam: The United States and the Muslim Middle East in the Early Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 30:4 (September 2006): 705-739; Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); David Zietsma, “‘Sin Has No History’: Religion, National Identity, and US Intervention, 1937-1941,” *Diplomatic History* 31:3 (June 2007): 531-565; Malcolm D. Magee, *What the World Should Be: Woodrow Wilson and the Crafting of a Faith-Based Foreign Policy* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2008); William Inboden, *Religion and American Foreign Policy 1945-1960: The Soul of Containment* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008); Paul Chamberlin, “A World Restored: Religion, Counterrevolution, and the Search for Order in the Middle East,” *Diplomatic History* 32:3 (June 2008): 441-469; Mark Edwards, “‘God Has Chosen Us’: Re-Membering Christian Realism, Rescuing Christendom, and the Contest of Responsibilities during the Cold War,” *Diplomatic History* 33:1 (January 2009): 67-94; Andrew Preston, “The Politics of Realism and Religion: Christian Responses to Bush’s New World Order,” *Diplomatic History* 34:1 (January 2010): 95-118; Milan Babik, “George D. Herron and the Eschatological Foundations of Woodrow Wilson’s Foreign Policy, 1917-1919,” *Diplomatic History* 35:5 (November 2011): 837-857; and Jonathan P. Herzog, *The Spiritual-Industrial Complex: America’s Religious Battle against Communism in the Early Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011). For a synthetic work examining religion across the entirety of American diplomatic history, see Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012).

relationship between his religious rhetoric and his accomplishments such as his human rights policy, the Panama Canal Treaties, and the Camp David Accords.¹⁶ More recently, D. Jason Berggren, a political science graduate student, proposed Carter demonstrated an “evangelical style” of presidential leadership in his foreign policy, especially toward the Middle East.¹⁷

Since the Carter administration was relatively recent history and Carter continued to be active as a former president, the larger body of scholarship on Carter’s foreign policy remained in flux. Gaddis Smith wrote one of the earliest studies of the foreign policy of the Carter administration, a balanced assessment that placed Carter in a Wilsonian framework. Smith’s book was the authoritative work on Carter’s foreign policy for a long time because it treated the subject in a more evenhanded manner compared to more critical accounts written by neoconservative scholars. Scholars such as Joshua Muravchik and Donald Spencer criticized Carter on issues such as his human rights policy, claiming it directly contributed to the fall of American-friendly dictatorships in Iran and Nicaragua. However, Smith defended Carter’s foreign policy as

¹⁶ Michael Leroy Allen, “The Human Rights Policy of Jimmy Carter: Foundations for Understanding” (PhD dissertation, Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, 1984); Clyde DeLoach, “Jimmy Carter: The Effect of Personal Religious Beliefs on His Presidency and Their Relationship to the Christian Realism of Reinhold Niebuhr” (PhD dissertation, Baylor University, 1985).

¹⁷ D. Jason Berggren, “I Had a Different Way of Governing: The Evangelical Presidential Style of Jimmy Carter and His Mission for Middle East Peace,” (PhD dissertation, Florida International University, 2007). See also D. Jason Berggren and Nicol C. Rae, “Jimmy Carter and George W. Bush: Faith, Foreign Policy, and an Evangelical Presidential Style,” *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 36:4 (December 2006): 606-632 and D. Jason Berggren, “I Had a Different Way of Governing: The Living Faith of President Carter,” *Journal of Church and State* 47:1 (2005): 43-61.

a fresh break from the typical Cold War mindset, but concluded the United States was not ready for such a drastic philosophical change in foreign policy.¹⁸

The opening of archival materials at the Jimmy Carter Presidential Library in Atlanta led to a wave of studies primarily focused on Carter's management style and the bureaucratic politics in making American foreign policy. Many of these scholars argued that on the one hand, Carter was a micromanager and on the other hand, he permitted too much bureaucratic fighting with his "spokes of a wheel" management style, especially between Brzezinski and Vance.¹⁹ However, a few revisionist scholars working with the same archival materials pointed to the benefits of Carter's attention to detail such as his handling of the Camp David negotiations.²⁰

Carter's career as an activist former president garnered scholarly interest because he expanded the possibilities of what former presidents could accomplish in their retirements. Many Carter biographers devoted portions of their books to Carter's post-presidential achievements or viewed Carter's time in office through the lens of his post-

¹⁸ See Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, and Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1986). Contemporaneous neoconservative accounts included Joshua Muravchik, *The Uncertain Crusade: Jimmy Carter and the Dilemmas of Human Rights Policy* (Washington: American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research, 1988); Donald Spencer, *The Carter Implosion: Jimmy Carter and the Amateur Style of Diplomacy* (New York: Praeger, 1988).

¹⁹ See Burton Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.*, second edition (Lawrence: The University Press of Kansas, 2006); Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008); Jean Garrison, *Games Advisors Play: Foreign Policy in the Nixon and Carter Administrations* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999); Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009). For more on Carter's leadership style, see Erwin C. Hargrove, *Jimmy Carter as President: Leadership and the Politics of the Public Good* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1988).

²⁰ See John Dumbrell, *The Carter Presidency: A Re-evaluation* (New York: Manchester University Press, 1993) and Robert Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000).

presidential accomplishments.²¹ As part of his prolific writing career and to follow up his presidential memoir *Keeping Faith*, Carter even wrote a post-presidential autobiography, largely focused on his work at the Carter Center.²²

Douglas Brinkley set the standard in his work on Carter's post-presidential years (1981-1996), arguing, "What Carter really wanted was to find some way to continue the unfinished business of his presidency."²³ Brinkley's work on Carter will not likely be rivaled for some time because he spent a lot of time interviewing and traveling with Carter for the book and had access to Carter's post-presidential papers (which are still unavailable to researchers at the time of this writing).²⁴

This work not only adds to the growing literature on religion and American foreign relations, but also makes a unique contribution to the historiography of Carter's foreign policy through its focus on religion. While the second chapter will explore the background of Carter's faith, the rest of the chapters will highlight how Carter and his

²¹ Peter G. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency*, (New York: Scribner, 1997), 474-508; Kenneth E. Morris, *Jimmy Carter: American Moralist*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 289-321; Julian E. Zelizer, *Jimmy Carter*, (New York: Times Books, 2010), 129-150; Frye Gaillard, *Prophet from Plains: Jimmy Carter and His Legacy*, (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 46-104; and Itai Nartzenfeld Sneh, *The Future Almost Arrived: How Jimmy Carter Failed to Change US Foreign Policy*, (New York: Peter Lang Publishers, 2008), 182-227.

²² Jimmy Carter, *Beyond the White House: Waging Peace, Fighting Disease, Building Hope*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007).

²³ Douglas Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), xvi; See also Brinkley's SHAFR Bernath Lecture, "The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The 'Hands On' Legacy of Our Thirty-Ninth President," *Diplomatic History* 20:4 (Fall 1996): 505-529.

²⁴ Marion Creekmore had similar advantages in his book about Carter's negotiations with North Korea in 1994 because he worked at the Carter Center as an advisor to the former president. See Marion Creekmore Jr., *A Moment of Crisis: Jimmy Carter, the Power of a Peacemaker, and North Korea's Nuclear Ambitions*, (New York: PublicAffairs, 2006). Researching and writing at about the same time as Brinkley, Rod Troester relied on publicly available documents from the Carter Center and newspaper accounts to craft his biography of Carter's post-presidential years. See Rod Troester, *Jimmy Carter as Peacemaker: A Post-Presidential Biography*, (Westport: Praeger, 1996).

advisors responded to conflicts with religious overtones, focusing on how much the president's faith did or did not come into play and how perceptions of his religion shaped the course of events.

The third chapter will discuss how Carter's faith-based interest in Israel as the land of the Bible drove his determination to secure peace between Israel and Egypt. During the extensive negotiations that culminated in the Camp David Accords and the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty, Carter frequently invoked religious language to call the other leaders to a higher purpose and had intensive religious conversations with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat, both deeply committed to their respective faiths.

The fourth chapter will address how Carter and his advisors did not fully understand the religious character of the Islamic revolution in Iran because it was unique at that point in world history. Later, after radical Iranians students took a number of American diplomats hostage, Carter tried to resolve the crisis through a variety of religious pleas to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini.

The fifth chapter will consider Carter's decision to authorize American support for Islamic mujahidin fighters in Afghanistan after the Soviet invasion. The president and other administration officials, especially Brzezinski, underestimated the potential future threat posed by Islamism, preferring to prioritize the American-Soviet conflict over other regional developments. Carter's support of the mujahidin followed past precedents of American support for Islamist forces opposing communist, socialist, and secular nationalist in the Middle East and Central Asia during the Cold War.

The sixth chapter will explore the concurrent rise of the Christian Right in the United States and its campaign to defeat Carter in his bid for re-election in 1980. Rather than attacking Carter purely on domestic issues such as abortion, prayer in schools, and gay rights, the Christian Right criticized Carter for foreign policy stances such as arms limitation treaties and military spending as well as the global implications of Communist subversion through the weakened moral fiber of traditional American values. Although Carter himself was an evangelical, he did not comprehend how different his brand of evangelicalism was from that of the Christian Right.

The seventh chapter will describe Carter's post-presidential involvement in the Middle East process and the controversies it created. The former president's religious rhetoric frequently seemed to compromise his status as an impartial mediator, sometimes even causing accusations of anti-Semitism.

This examination of Carter, his faith, and the religiously-tinted conflicts he faced illustrates the benefits (the Camp David Accords) and limits (Iranian hostage crisis, the Christian Right) of foreign policy shaped by a president with strong public religious convictions as well as the advantages and pitfalls of scholars examining the impact of religion on decision making. It also illuminates how religious nationalism gradually replaced the American-Soviet ideological contest as the principal cause of conflict, especially after the end of the Cold War.

Chapter 2

THE FAITH OF JIMMY CARTER: A BACKGROUND

Hendrik Hertzberg, one of President Jimmy Carter's speechwriters, once mused about the president's deep Christian convictions, "In the speech-writing office we used to say it was no coincidence that the man's initials are 'J.C.'"¹ Hertzberg's quip represented the intense interest that Carter's religious beliefs generated because of the novelty of his "born-again" faith in the American political scene. Understanding the background of Carter's faith and its historical context helps explain how he interacted with the various religious nationalist groups during and after his presidency.

Many scholars and commentators have discussed Carter's religion. Journalist Wesley Pippert, seeking to make sense of his faith, followed Carter after he secured a hold on the Democratic nomination, listening to his speeches and Sunday School classes until a year after the election. Based on his observations, Pippert explained that Carter's underlying belief in the sinfulness and fallibility of humans and the possibility for redemption extended to nations as well, concluding "the core of his religious and personal faith seems to be the core of his political philosophy as well."² A Carter campaign volunteer concurred, saying that his policies represented "a fuller implementation of his religious beliefs, of doing what he believes as right to fulfill human needs."³

¹ As cited in Dan Ariail and Cheryl Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter's Apprentice: The Spiritual Biography of Jimmy Carter* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 35.

² Wesley G. Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter: In His Own Words* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1978), 14-15.

³ As cited in Kenneth E. Morris, *Jimmy Carter: American Moralist* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1996), 157.

Others commented on the historical context of Carter's faith. Historian Leonard Sweet argued, "In historic perspective, Carter is a classic, pre-Civil War evangelical, and for him, the personal and social gospel are one and the same. Carter is cut from the same cloth as Charles G. Finney."⁴ During the 1976 campaign, historian E. Brooks Holifield wrote an article for *The New Republic* describing the candidate's faith, explaining, "as a religious man Carter embodies a form of Southern evangelicalism with roots in the Puritan era, an 18th-century variety of religious pluralism, and a sophisticated 'Christian Realism.'" Despite the sometimes contradictory nature of these three elements, Holifield expressed hope that "such an internal system of checks and balances could turn out to be a presidential virtue," especially in the aftermath of Vietnam and Watergate.⁵

This background chapter will consider the different roots of Carter's faith: southern evangelicalism, a firm commitment to the separation of church and state and the freedom of conscience, and a Christian realism influenced by Reinhold Niebuhr. In addition, it will explore the impact of the civil rights movement and the role of Israel in Carter's religious background. Finally, it will conclude by briefly discussing the pre-1977 trajectory of some evangelicals and fundamentalists who had seemingly similar beliefs as Carter. However, there were significant theological and political differences between them, so these evangelicals and fundamentalist later formed the Christian Right.

Southern evangelicalism was the first major influence on Carter's faith. Like many children of the rural South at that time, Carter attended an evangelical church and

⁴ Arial and Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter's Apprentice*, 145. Charles Finney was a popular revivalist preacher during the Second Great Awakening who also supported the antislavery movement and greater participation among women in revival meetings.

⁵ E. Brooks Holifield, "The Three Strands of Jimmy Carter's Religion," *The New Republic*, June 5, 1976.

had a gradual conversion experience typical of many children raised in church. His mother Lillian recalled that while “Jimmy was not religious when he was young, he took his role in the church seriously like everything else in his life.”⁶

At age eleven, Carter accepted Jesus as his Savior at a revival service and was soon thereafter baptized at his home congregation, Plains Baptist Church. In retrospect, Carter did not consider his baptism as the point of his conversion, preferring to see his decision to follow Christ as an ongoing process. He later wrote: “Being born again didn’t happen to me when I was eleven. For me, it has been an evolutionary thing. Rather than a flash of light or a sudden vision of God speaking, it involved a series of steps that have brought me steadily closer to Christ.”⁷

Carter’s parents raised him in the Southern Baptist tradition. His father was a staunch Baptist and his mother was a more theologically liberal Methodist (although both of Lillian’s parents converted to Methodism when they married because her father was a mainstream Baptist and her mother was a fundamentalist Baptist).⁸ However, Carter had a diverse denominational perspective because he, like most of the other families in Plains, attended the local Baptist and Methodist churches on alternating weekends because neither congregation had a full-time preacher.⁹

Carter later commented on his experience attending both churches, noting there were “few detectable differences” between the Baptist and Methodist churches in Plains,

⁶ As cited in Peter Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 31.

⁷ Jimmy Carter, *Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1996), 21-22.

⁸ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 17. Lillian also joined the Baptist church after marrying Earl.

⁹ Carter, *Living Faith*, 195.

except for their method in selecting their preachers. He recalled, “the people of Plains seemed to prefer more moderate preaching, so we were not afflicted with the kind of harsh fire-and-brimstone sermons that we sometimes heard in other churches.”¹⁰ In fact, some of the preaching Carter heard as a boy seemed quite liberal compared to the contemporary theology of the Southern Baptist Convention. For example, Jesse Eugene Hall, the pastor at Plains Baptist for much of Carter’s teenage years, taught that Genesis 1 did not necessarily imply a literal six, twenty-four hour day creation.¹¹

Church activities constituted the central feature of social life in Plains. During his boyhood, Carter participated in the local chapter of the Royal Ambassadors, the Southern Baptist version of the Boy Scouts, a group led by his father. During his teenage years, he and his siblings attended youth group events at the local Baptist and Methodist churches such as “prom parties” that encouraged closely chaperoned contact between boys and girls.¹²

Later, during his time in the navy, Carter frequently presided over worship services on the submarines on which he served. Rather than attending the Episcopalian services offered at the Naval Academy, Carter often attended a nearby Baptist congregation where he taught a children’s Sunday School class.¹³ Although Carter enjoyed the many opportunities the navy offered, he felt that he and Rosalynn lacked the

¹⁰ Jimmy Carter, *An Hour Before Daylight: Memoirs of a Rural Boyhood* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 220.

¹¹ Leo P. Ribuffo, “God and Jimmy Carter” in *Transforming Faith: The Sacred and Secular in Modern American History*, ed. M.L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1989), 147.

¹² For more on Carter’s early spiritual development, see his spiritual autobiography, Jimmy Carter, *Living Faith*, especially chapters 1 and 2.

¹³ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 51.

sort of spiritual community they enjoyed in Plains. After returning for his father Earl's funeral in 1953, the 28-year old Carter decided to leave the navy and return home to Plains. Carter felt that his father's accomplishments in the small town proved that enough challenges existed there for him in the future.¹⁴

Throughout his teenage and young adult years, Carter had doubts about his faith. The tragedy of his father's death inspired Carter to think more deeply about religious questions, so he consulted the works of theologians such as Paul Tillich, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Karl Barth, Martin Buber, and Hans Kung. He found Tillich's work especially enlightening because in Carter's words, Tillich argued "that doubt is an acceptable, even necessary aspect of faith—that faith implies a continuing search, not necessarily a final answer."¹⁵

Upon returning to Plains, Carter took over the family's peanut warehouse business and served in many of the same community activities as his father whom he had idolized. At Plains Baptist Church, he taught the junior high boys' Sunday school class, became the superintendent of the junior high department, helped build a youth camp for the Friendship Baptist Association, and even served as a deacon in the congregation despite his more liberal views on alcohol. Pastor Tommie Jones remembered Carter as "the best assistant I ever had."¹⁶

¹⁴ Carter, *Living Faith*, 44-45.

¹⁵ Carter, *Living Faith*, 24-25.

¹⁶ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 101.

After several years of becoming a prominent figure in the community, Carter ran for the Georgia state senate in 1962.¹⁷ Even at the earliest stages of his political career, Carter saw public office as a higher calling. After announcing his candidacy, a visiting pastor holding a revival meeting in Plains asked, “How can you, as a Christian, a deacon, and a Sunday school teacher, become involved in politics?” Carter quickly responded, “I will have 75,000 people in my senate district. How would you like to have a congregation that big?”¹⁸ Longtime friend and biographer Peter Bourne commented on Carter’s comparison, “As a member of the Baptist faith in which preachers are not appointed by a church hierarchy, but elected by the congregation they serve, the analogy seemed to [Carter] quite apt.”¹⁹

Extremely ambitious, Carter decided shortly after entering the state senate to run for governor in 1966 as the moderate in a three-way Democratic primary against the relatively liberal former governor Ellis Arnall and the archsegregationist Lester Maddox who displayed an ax handle in his restaurant as a warning to potential black customers to stay out. In the initial primary, Carter placed third, but his candidacy weakened Arnall enough that Maddox ultimately won the nomination and the general election. He later recalled, “I could not believe that God would let [Maddox] beat me and become the governor of our state.”²⁰

¹⁷ For more on his 1962 state senate race, see Jimmy Carter, *Turning Point: A Candidate, A State, and A Nation Come of Age* (New York: Times Books, 1992).

¹⁸ Carter, *Living Faith*, 9.

¹⁹ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 113.

²⁰ Carter, *Living Faith*, 202.

Following his defeat in the gubernatorial election, Carter felt depressed because he was unsure how God's providence was working in his electoral defeat to a segregationist like Maddox. In the midst of his angst over losing, Carter had a "born-again" experience. Despite being baptized at age eleven, this moment marked a turning point in Carter's commitment to his faith. He realized he had reached out to 300,000 people across the state in his bid for governor, but he had only visited 140 families to provide his Christian witness since returning to Plains. About that same time, his sister Ruth Carter Stapleton, a charismatic pastor, came to Plains to encourage her brother. On a walk in the woods, they discussed his spiritual anguish and as a result of that conversation, he made a decision to commit his life fully to Christ and to keep his political ambitions secondary to God.²¹

To demonstrate his newfound commitment to his faith, Carter went on a series of short-term mission trips to evangelize in poor communities in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts. Following these trips, Carter later admitted,

I began to realize that when I envisioned a supreme being, he was more like Muhammad, the founder of Islam, a patently successful man in earthly terms: a powerful warrior, political leader, founder of a great institutional church. This was in many ways the opposite of the Jesus of the Gospels, or the image of the "suffering servant" in Isaiah, whom Christians identify with Christ.²²

Carter had difficulty reconciling his ambitions for earthly success in politics and business with his realization that Jesus taught his followers to reject these worldly standards of

²¹ Ariail and Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter's Apprentice*, 47-48.

²² Carter, *Living Faith*, 226.

achievement. Thus, Carter poured himself into a number of Christian charitable and evangelistic works to compensate for his considerable secular aspirations.

Years later, in 1976, during the North Carolina primary, Carter described his born-again experience, offering a disclaimer, “It was not a profound stroke, a miracle, a voice of God from heaven. It was not anything of that kind. It wasn’t anything mysterious. It was the same kind of experience that many who become Christians in a deeply personal way and it has given me a deep feeling of equanimity and peace.”²³ After his testimony, a television news anchor explained, “incidentally, we’ve checked this out. Being ‘born again’ is not a bizarre experience or the voice of God from the mountaintop. It’s a fairly common experience known to millions of Americans—particularly if you’re Baptist.”²⁴

Carter’s faith quickly became a popular topic of conversation around the country during the election cycle. In multiple interviews, Carter described his conversion experience and explained he never prayed to God for victory.²⁵ He highlighted his faith as an asset as president because it provided a “basis for calmness in the face of adversity or in the face of national crises.”²⁶

To reassure voters who found his born-again faith peculiar, Carter frequently emphasized his strong belief in the separation of church and state. Furthermore, he often

²³ Ariail and Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter’s Apprentice*, 47.

²⁴ Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter*, 2.

²⁵ *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, Volume One, Part One (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 178; *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, Volume One, Part Two (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 974.

²⁶ *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, 980.

highlighted the importance of the freedom of conscience to audiences wary of his faith while relating freedom of conscience to the Christian doctrine of the priesthood of all believers in church settings.

Carter's strong beliefs about the separation of church and state had deep roots in his family because his father faced those dilemmas as he served in the Georgia state legislature. He later reflected, "I inherited my own support for the separation of church and state from my father, I guess, but I came to realize while holding public office how ambiguous is the line between the secular and the sacred."²⁷ Carter's public religiosity troubled some of the secular organizations hesitant to work with someone so open about his personal faith while his commitment to separation of church and state upset religious groups more interested in a role in politics.

The historic Baptist commitment to the separation of church and state also heavily shaped Carter's beliefs on the matter. In interviews and Sunday school classes, he frequently argued that the Baptist church originated in a desire to keep church and state separate, citing the example of Roger Williams and the founding of the colony of Rhode Island.²⁸ As Michael Hammond, a former University of Arkansas doctoral student, perceptively observed, "When [Carter] discussed the separation of church and state, it was a familiar doctrine of his church. He was speaking of it not as a constitutional scholar, but as a Baptist layman committed to a principle."²⁹

²⁷ Carter, *Living Faith*, 126-127.

²⁸ Robert Scheer, "The *Playboy* Interview: Jimmy Carter," *Playboy*, November 1976; Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter*, 163; *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, 967, 975.

²⁹ Michael D. Hammond, "Twice Born, Once Elected: The Making of the Religious Right during the Carter Administration" (PhD diss., University of Arkansas, 2009), 135.

Carter's commitment to the separation of church and state was apparent from the beginnings of his political career. During his time in the Georgia state senate, he acted proposed to add the freedom of religion language of the First Amendment to the state constitution because he felt the existing language required "that God be worshipped."³⁰

In an interview with Bill Moyers, Carter told the 1962 story how he viewed his senate district as a congregation of 75,000 people, but then he declared, "I don't look on the Presidency as a pastorate...I don't look on it with religious connotations," hoping to alleviate concerns among Americans suspicious of his evangelical faith.³¹

During his presidency, in response to a question about whether he should repent for the sins of the United States as its president, Carter answered, "I don't consider myself to be the spiritual leader of this country. But I am a political leader. I have a right, I think, and a duty, to be frank with the American people about my own belief; and I am not a priest nor a bishop, nor someone who fills a religious pulpit and is authorized nor asked to repent for the whole country."³²

In addition to his firm convictions about the separation of church and state, Carter was equally committed to the longtime Baptist principle of freedom from creeds and the priesthood of all believers. During his presidency, in a Sunday school class at First Baptist Church in Washington, Carter taught that the Baptist church provided "a way to come together to exchange our personal, individualistic ideas about Christ and our

³⁰ Holifield, "The Three Stands of Jimmy Carter's Religion."

³¹ *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, Volume One, Part One, 179.

³² As cited in Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter*, 120-121.

relationship with Him.”³³ Carter’s interpretation of the priesthood of all believers enabled him to espouse doctrinal beliefs outside of mainstream Baptist thinking. However, it set him up for later conflict with evangelical voters who believed they shared similar positions on specific theological matters with the president simply because of his Southern Baptist affiliation.

Although Carter held more traditional evangelical positions on issues such as the virgin birth, Carter did not believe in the inerrancy or infallibility of Scripture. In a March 1976 interview, John Hart of NBC News asked Carter about Pauline writings about the role of women in church and in the family. Carter replied, “I don’t agree with that concept of the husband’s being dominant over the wives. Although I hate to admit there’s part of the Bible with which I disagree, that’s a passage I’ve never been able to accept even though I’ve tried. My wife doesn’t accept it either.”³⁴ Just a few weeks before the election, a group of reporters asked Carter about the creation story in between Sunday school and the worship service at Plains Baptist Church. Carter responded that he did not believe in a literal, seven 24-hour day creation, adding, “part of the Bible obviously was written in allegories.”³⁵

After his presidency, Carter was more blunt about his view on inspiration and the Bible in a Sunday school class at Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains. He taught,

At the same time, it’s true that the Bible, though inspired by God, was written by fallible human beings who shared the knowledge and beliefs of their times. The science and astronomy of the Bible are inaccurate by

³³ As cited in Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter*, 179.

³⁴ As cited in Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter*, 16-17.

³⁵ As cited in Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter*, 17.

modern standards (speaking of the earth's "four corners," for example), and biblical writers in New Testament times still wrote as if slavery were a legitimate social institution that should not be questioned. So it is appropriate to consider the times in which the Bible was written when interpreting the meaning of Scripture and its message for us today.³⁶

Clearly, Carter was no fundamentalist, either before or after his presidency. Scholar Richard Hutcheson observed, "Carter believes strongly in the authority of Scripture, but without legalistic literalism of interpretation."³⁷ Carter preferred a Christocentric hermeneutic, interpreting scripture "by the words and actions of Jesus Christ."³⁸ However, Carter did not entirely dismiss the supernatural or miraculous like some mainline Protestants, affirming his belief in the historicity of God creating Eve from Adam's rib and the resurrection of Lazarus.³⁹ Nevertheless, in the end, his more liberal doctrinal beliefs made him an easier target for the Christian Right in the 1980 election.

Despite his experience as president, his study of the world's foremost theologians, and his sometimes unorthodox beliefs, Carter believed he "never deviate[d] in any appreciable way from expressing the traditional Christian beliefs that I inherited from my father."⁴⁰ However, by 2000, he and Rosalynn decided to sever their ties to the increasingly fundamentalist Southern Baptist Convention due to its increasing emphasis on all-male leadership in the church and its movement away from the separation of

³⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Sources of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 128.

³⁷ Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr. *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 111.

³⁸ Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 6.

³⁹ Ribuffo, "God and Jimmy Carter," 148-149.

⁴⁰ Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, 29.

church and state. Still, they remained members of Maranatha Baptist Church in Plains.⁴¹

To put the matter in Reaganesque terms, Carter believed he did not leave the Baptist church, the Baptist church left him.

To balance his evangelicalism and his strong belief in religious pluralism in his political decision-making, Carter made use of Christian realist theology. Reinhold Niebuhr's writings inspired this pillar of Carter's faith, especially in how Carter applied his faith in politics. Niebuhr wrote in the context of the Depression, World War II, and the onset of the Cold War, so his writings frequently warned readers of the brokenness of the world, especially in light of utopian ideas proposed by liberal Christians and secularists. Niebuhr's most important concept to Carter was that while individuals could aspire to the biblical ideal of *agape* love, governments could only hope to provide justice because they inherently always pursued self-preservation.⁴² Carter later explained, "A nation cannot demonstrate sacrificial love. When I was president of the United States...I did not have the right to sacrifice the interests of American citizens for others."⁴³

After his loss in the 1966 gubernatorial election, Carter read an edited collection, *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics*, which described Niebuhr's thinking on the limits of the state's ability to rectify the sinfulness of humanity through excerpts from his voluminous

⁴¹ Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, 42.

⁴² For more on Niebuhr's theology and historical context, see Richard Wightman Fox, *Reinhold Niebuhr: A Biography* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1985); Ronald H. Stone, *Reinhold Niebuhr: Prophet to Politicians* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1981); Charles C. Brown, *Niebuhr and His Age: Reinhold Niebuhr's Prophetic Role and Legacy* (Harrisburg: Trinity Press International, 2002); Ronald H. Stone, *Professor Reinhold Niebuhr: A Mentor to the Twentieth Century* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992); and Martin Haliwell, *The Constant Dialogue: Reinhold Niebuhr and American Intellectual Culture* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005).

⁴³ As cited in Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 129.

writings. The book quickly became Carter's "political bible" and the launching point for further exploration in Niebuhr's theology.⁴⁴ Over the next ten years, Carter read other works, including Niebuhr's most famous book, *Moral Man and Immoral Society*, and June Bingham's biography, *Courage to Change*.⁴⁵ In fact, several of Niebuhr's works appeared on the small bookshelf in Carter's private study adjacent to the Oval Office.⁴⁶

Carter peppered many of his speeches, writings, and Sunday school classes with quotations from Niebuhr. In fact, his admonition, "The sad duty of politics is to establish justice in a sinful world," appeared alongside lyrics from the musician Bob Dylan and the poet Dylan Thomas on the epigraph page of Carter's campaign autobiography.⁴⁷ In another instance, Carter quoted Niebuhr in his acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention, "I have spoken a lot of times about love. But love must be aggressively translated into simple justice."⁴⁸ A Carter aide complimented him on the line. Carter quickly responded, "It ought to be. It's Niebuhr."⁴⁹

Despite his great affinity for Niebuhr, Carter downplayed his knowledge, telling audiences, "I don't claim to be any expert on theology—not at all" or describing his use

⁴⁴ Holifield, "The Three Strands of Jimmy Carter's Religion"; See Harry Davis and Robert Good, ed., *Reinhold Niebuhr on Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1960).

⁴⁵ Frank Ruechel, "Politics and Morality Revisited: Jimmy Carter and Reinhold Niebuhr," *Atlanta History*, 22; See June Bingham, *Courage to Change: An Introduction to the Life and Thought of Reinhold Niebuhr* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1961) and Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man and Immoral Society: A Study of Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

⁴⁶ "Impressions of Power and Poetry," *Time*, June 20, 1977.

⁴⁷ Jimmy Carter, *Why Not the Best?* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1975), unnumbered epigraph page at the front of the book.

⁴⁸ Jimmy Carter, "Our Nation's Past and Future": Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention in New York City, July 15, 1976, in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25953>.

⁴⁹ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 335.

of Niebuhr as “strictly amateurish.” Future White House religious liaison Robert Maddox recounted that Carter’s knowledge of Niebuhr was “not scholarly because he never pretended to be a scholar. But far, far more than the average layman.”⁵⁰ Bourne rebutted critics claiming Carter’s knowledge of Niebuhr was superficial, explaining that Carter “was not looking to replicate the views of Niebuhr, but rather to take from them whatever would help him to achieve his own perfectibility as a Christian...and make him a better, more comfortable Christian in the political arena.”⁵¹

However, Carter was more optimistic about the goodness of humanity than Niebuhr because he experienced the positive changes in the South during the Civil Rights Era. Carter never actively participated himself, but frequently took stands against discrimination in his local community. Journalist Frye Gaillard explained, “[Carter] was not a crusader in the mold of Clarence Jordan [founder of the interracial Koinonia Farms cooperative near Carter’s home in Plains]. He was more a real-life Atticus Finch—a prominent and respected citizen of his community who seldom went out of his way to cause a stir. But when events conspired to thrust him into controversy, he didn’t duck.”⁵²

Carter’s attitudes toward civil rights, and later human rights, had roots in his childhood. The most important source was his mother’s defiance of Jim Crow customs of the day.⁵³ Lillian derived her liberal approach to religion and race relations from her father, Jim Jack Gordy, a local postmaster who frequently invited blacks to eat with him

⁵⁰ As cited in Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 109, 110.

⁵¹ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 172.

⁵² Frye Gaillard, *Prophet from Plains: Jimmy Carter and His Legacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 7.

⁵³ See Jimmy Carter, *A Remarkable Mother* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2008), especially chapter six.

in the post office's back room.⁵⁴ He later claimed that his mother and her unorthodox cultural and religious beliefs was the most important factor in the development of his personal Christian convictions.⁵⁵ Even though Carter's father Earl outwardly supported segregation, he secretly and generously supported many black families in the area.⁵⁶

Despite claiming Plains as his hometown, Carter grew up in the nearby small community of Archery, a predominantly black hamlet. He fondly remembered spending most of his boyhood playing with neighboring black children and not with other white children outside of school and church until his teenage years.⁵⁷ At church, Carter rarely heard sermons giving God's sanction to segregation. In fact, Pastor Jesse Eugene Hall's preaching "exerted a moderating influence on racial attitudes" in the community.⁵⁸

Several examples existed of Carter's principled stands against discrimination. Shortly after returning to Plains, his neighbors pressured him to join the local chapter of the White Citizens' Council, but he politely declined. Not satisfied, a group of Carter's best customers at the warehouse offered to pay his membership dues, but Carter believed, "It was not the payment of dues that was a problem; even with their money, I could not contribute to an organization in which I did not believe." Carter's refusal to join caused his family some financial hardship because many members of the Council boycotted his

⁵⁴ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 16-17.

⁵⁵ Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 106.

⁵⁶ Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 108.

⁵⁷ See Carter, *An Hour Before Daylight*, especially chapter four.

⁵⁸ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 31.

business.⁵⁹ Despite the boycott, he did business with Clarence Jordan without vocally supporting his interracial Koinonia Farms enterprise.⁶⁰

As a part of the Sumter County school board, Carter vocally supported the plan to consolidate the county's smaller high schools (including the black one) into a larger one to offer more educational opportunities for all students.⁶¹ In 1965, Carter and his family were the only ones, aside from a person with a hearing problem, who voted to welcome black worshippers at Plains Baptist Church.⁶² However, the Carter family did not suffer as much as others who did not conform to local customs of race relations might have. Carter surmised, "In a way, our approach to the race issue was also excused because of my mother's acknowledged 'eccentricity' and because we were known to have spent a number of years in the navy."⁶³

Carter's religious convictions and his experience growing up and living in the Jim Crow South later shaped one of the cornerstones of his presidency: his emphasis on human rights. Robert Maddox explained, "[Carter's] religion shaped his human rights policies...[which] grew out of his own faith, his regard for human beings, out of his years of involvement in the civil rights struggle in Georgia."⁶⁴ Carter attributed his focus on

⁵⁹ Carter, *Living Faith*, 65.

⁶⁰ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 99-100.

⁶¹ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 106-108; Also see Deanna L. Michael, *Jimmy Carter as Educational Policymaker: Equal Opportunity and Efficiency* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2009), especially the first chapter.

⁶² Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter*, 28.

⁶³ Carter, *Living Faith*, 69.

⁶⁴ As cited in Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 130.

human rights “to the laws and the prophets of the Judeo-Christian traditions.”⁶⁵ He later wrote, “As president, I tried to make human rights a core value of my administration. This emphasis was derived from my experience growing up in the South, and from the guilt I shared with others over the way we deprived our black neighbors of their human rights.”⁶⁶

Carter’s strong religious convictions about human rights, social justice, and equality in the Bible shaped his outlook toward Israel very differently from many evangelical and fundamentalist Christians who favored American policies supporting Israel based on what they interpreted as biblical commands. Some believed in a dispensationalist premillennial reading of scriptures where the second coming of Christ would occur after the Jews returned to their original homeland and a cataclysmic war erupted. Although Carter referred to the modern state of Israel as the “fulfillment of biblical prophecy” during the presidential campaign, he was not a proponent of dispensational premillennialism.⁶⁷ Historian Leo Ribuffo speculated that Carter read Revelation in a post-millennial fashion, based on a Sunday School lesson he taught during the 1976 campaign on the second coming of Christ. Carter explained, “Jesus stands at the door and knocks...but he can’t break down the door. He doesn’t want to. It must be opened by our understanding.”⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Ariail and Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter’s Apprentice*, 154-155.

⁶⁶ Carter, *Living Faith*, 123-124.

⁶⁷ As cited in Paul Charles Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus*, (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 82.

⁶⁸ Ribuffo, “God and Jimmy Carter,” 148.

During his childhood, he had little exposure to premillennial thought, as the pastors at Plains Baptist Church typically did not teach dispensational doctrine, except for a few years when fundamentalist Royall Callaway served as the minister.⁶⁹ Carter seemed skeptical of attaching prophetic significance to the current events, citing Jesus' admonition that no one will know the hour or day of the second coming.⁷⁰ In fact, he later condemned the "bizarre" influence of Christian Zionists on American foreign policy toward Israel.⁷¹

On the other hand, some evangelicals justified their unconditional support for Israel by pointing to Genesis 12:3 where God tells Abraham, "I will bless those who bless you [the Jews]. And I will curse him who curses you" as a biblical command to support the state of Israel and the Jewish people in order to receive God's favor.⁷² However, Carter's affinity for Israel resulted from his appreciation of the land and the people that appeared throughout the history of the Bible rather than an interpretation of scripture commanding Christian support of the nation of Israel.

A 1973 trip to Israel with his wife Rosalynn marked one of Governor Carter's few forays into the international arena to bolster his experience in foreign affairs, but his

⁶⁹ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 31.

⁷⁰ Carter, *Living Faith*, x-xi.

⁷¹ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 31; Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, 113-114.

⁷² Evangelical leader and founder of Christians United for Israel John Hagee referred to Genesis 12:3 as "God's foreign policy statement." As cited in Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 257. The biblical passage is from the New King James Version. For more on evangelical and fundamentalist support of Israel, see Irvine Anderson, *Biblical Interpretation and Middle East Policy: The Promised Land, America, and Israel, 1917-2002* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005); Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Timothy P. Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel's Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004).

religious background played an important role in shaping his perception of his trip. Carter recalled that, “this visit to the Holy Land made a lasting impression on me” due to his deep Christian faith and his experience of finally seeing the places he had long taught about in Sunday school classes. He also remarked, “like almost all other American Christians, I believed that Jewish survivors of the Holocaust deserved their own nation and had the right to live peacefully with their neighbors.” Furthermore, he said, “This homeland for the Jews was compatible with the teachings of the Bible.”⁷³

In preparation for the trip, Carter extensively reviewed maps comparing ancient and modern Israel. He recollected, “I was torn between the pleasure of visiting the Christian holy places I had longed to see since I was a child and the knowledge that I should be preparing for a future career [in national politics].”⁷⁴ During his trip, Carter made time for both pursuits as he met with American archaeologists doing an excavation in Jerusalem, visited the Israeli Holocaust museum Yad Vashem, presented Hebrew Bibles to graduates at an Israeli military base, hiked up Mount Carmel to see the place of the biblical contest between Elijah and the prophets of Baal, and even took a swim in the Jordan River near where he believed John the Baptist had baptized Jesus.⁷⁵

During their trip, he and Rosalynn wanted to visit the synagogue at Ayelet Hashahar and attend the worship service on the Sabbath Day. When they arrived, the

⁷³ Jimmy Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land: A Plan That Will Work* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 13.

⁷⁴ Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 23.

⁷⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 28; Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 24-28; Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 18.

Carters expressed shock after seeing only two other worshippers at the synagogue.⁷⁶

Later on that same trip, during a visit with Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir, Governor Carter expressed his concern over the lack of religious interest among the Jews at Ayelet Hashahar on the Sabbath day service. Meir, the secular Labor Party leader, laughed at Carter's observation, but the lifetime Sunday school teacher reminded her that "during biblical times, the Israelites triumphed when they were close to God and were defeated when unfaithful."⁷⁷ Carter's later recollections of this story haunted him after his presidency because Israelis pointed to this statement as proof of anti-Semitism in the controversy over *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*.

While in Israel, Carter had only a few opportunities to observe the lives of Palestinians still present in Israel and in the territories conquered in the 1967 war. Based on his limited experience, he drew some historical comparisons between the Palestinian situation and past treatment of minority groups in the United States. For instance, he associated the situation of the Palestinian refugees to the Native Americans forcibly relocated on the Trail of Tears.⁷⁸ NSC Middle East expert William Quandt also speculated that Carter "saw in the Palestinian question parallels with the situation of American blacks" because of his experience living in the Jim Crow South.⁷⁹ However, after seeing the changes produced by the civil rights movement in the United States, Carter left Israel optimistic that its government would dismantle the limited number of

⁷⁶ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 25.

⁷⁷ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 29-30.

⁷⁸ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 27-28.

⁷⁹ Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1986), 30-31.

settlements in the occupied territories and continue protecting the rights of the Palestinians.⁸⁰

Prior to becoming president, Carter had extremely limited foreign policy credentials because he had always been a state politician. However, his religious background helped shape what little he knew about the world upon entering national politics. For example, Carter recalled an early conversation he had about China,

Sometimes my visitors were amused at the way my Deep South Baptist ideas crept into discussions. Once when we were discussing the Far East, I remarked that the people of our country had a deep and natural affection for the people of China. When most of the group laughed, I was perplexed and a little embarrassed. It took me a few moments to realize that not everyone had looked upon Christian missionaries in China as the ultimate heroes and had not, as youngsters, contributed a penny or a nickel each week, year after year, toward schools and hospitals for the little Chinese children.⁸¹

To learn about countries other than Israel and further burnish his foreign policy credentials for his impending presidential campaign, Carter joined the Trilateral Commission, an international affairs think tank. As part of the commission, Carter rubbed elbows with many luminaries in the political, academic, and business world and discussed US-Soviet competition, American relations with Western Europe and Japan, and global issues such as energy consumption and economic development. Carter intensely studied the commission's briefing books, impressing many of the other members with how familiar he was with the issues as an obscure southern governor.⁸²

⁸⁰ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 27, 34.

⁸¹ As cited in Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 103.

⁸² As governor of Georgia and as a member of the Trilateral Commission, Carter visited the following countries: Mexico, Costa Rica, Colombia, Brazil, Argentina, Great Britain, Belgium, West Germany, Israel, and Japan. Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 239-241, 266-268.

At one Trilateral Commission meeting, Carter drew on his experience in Israel and suggested that the United States should actively pursue a peaceful settlement in the Middle East by becoming a more impartial mediator, a comment that caught the attention of Zbigniew Brzezinski, the Trilateral Commission's Executive Director and Carter's future national security advisor. Brzezinski advised Carter's campaign on foreign policy issues and educated him on many of the regional issues he would have to handle as president.⁸³ While his participation in the Trilateral Commission equipped him for the Egyptian-Israeli negotiations, his experience did not prepare him for the crises he would later face in Iran and Afghanistan, two seemingly stable situations in the mid-1970s.

While Carter prepared to run for president, evangelical and fundamentalists who had beliefs similar to those of the Democratic nominee began to get excited about the prospect of a "born-again" president. However, aside from some limited advocacy on a few select issues such as support for Israel or school prayer, evangelical and fundamentalist Christians were not involved in national politics in an organized manner. Carter's campaign increased awareness among these Christians of the potential influence they could wield as an electoral bloc, a power they would exercise through the various organizations of the Christian Right in the 1980 election after being so disappointed with the first "born-again" president.

Despite the similarities between some elements of the Christian Right and Carter, they had considerably different experiences on matters of race and civil rights, contributing to their divergent political worldviews and conflicting positions on a host of domestic and foreign issues. Whereas Carter took stands against segregation in his

⁸³ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 15.

community on a number of occasions, future Christian Right leader Jerry Falwell condemned civil rights activists as communist agitators, criticizing civil rights leaders who also served as pastors for protesting against segregation rather than preaching the gospel.⁸⁴ In fact, the various groups of the Christian Right did not formally organize until midway through Carter's term. An IRS decision to strip the fundamentalist Bob Jones University of its tax-exempt status hastened the political mobilization of many evangelicals and fundamentalists fearful of churches or other parachurch organizations being denied tax-exempt status for racially discriminatory practices.⁸⁵ Thus, issues of race and civil rights played a formative role in fostering the later conflicts between Carter and the Christian Right over SALT II, defense spending, and other foreign policy issues.

While the different elements of Carter's religious background framed his policymaking outlook, his regular devotional and spiritual practices also shaped his decision making. During his presidency, he continued his daily habit of reading one chapter of the Bible each day in Spanish to help him maintain his second language and focus more on the words which were so familiar to him in English. On his way to the Oval Office each morning, he recited Psalm 19:14 to center himself on God for the day. He also occasionally taught the couples' Sunday school class at Washington's First

⁸⁴ Michael Sean Winters, *God's Right Hand: How Jerry Falwell Made God a Republican and Baptized the American Right* (New York: HarperOne, 2012), 62-64; Susan Friend Harding, *The Book of Jerry Falwell: Fundamentalist Language and Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 112-113.

⁸⁵ For a more detailed explanation of how this IRS decision drove the formation of the Christian Right, see Randall Balmer, *God in the White House: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 94, 97 and Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America—An Evangelical's Lament* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 11-12, 15-16.

Baptist Church.⁸⁶ Carter also spent a considerable amount of time in prayer in the small study adjacent to the Oval Office. He later explained how he asked three questions when he prayed for God's guidance during his time in office, "Are my goals appropriate? Am I doing the right thing, based on my personal moral code, my Christian faith, and the duties of my current position? Have I done my best, based on the alternatives open to me?"⁸⁷

Carter's faith clearly played an important role in his personal and political life. However, his strong convictions about the separation of church and state and his Christian realism balanced his ambitions to transform the world in the name of God. In the varied and complex religious conflicts he encountered along the way in Israel, Egypt, Iran, Afghanistan, and even in the United States, Carter never used his own religious background lightly in policymaking.

⁸⁶ Ariail and Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter's Apprentice*, 86; *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, Volume One, Part Two, 966-967; Pippert, *The Spiritual Legacy of Jimmy Carter*, 9.

⁸⁷ Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 296.

Chapter 3

"SWORDS INTO PLOWSHARES": JIMMY CARTER'S QUEST TO FIND MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Throughout his 1976 presidential campaign, Georgia Governor Jimmy Carter frequently declared his spiritual attachment to Israel. In an interview with *Liberty* magazine on the eve of the 1976 election, Carter told the reporter, “as a Christian, who’s visited extensively through Israel, I think that, yes, it was a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy to have Israel established as a nation.”¹ On another occasion, speaking at an Orthodox Jewish synagogue, Carter explained, “The land of Israel has always meant a great deal to me. As a boy I read of the prophets and martyrs in the Bible—the same Bible that we all study together... The survival of Israel is not just a political issue, it’s a moral imperative.”²

One should partially attribute Carter’s greatest achievement in office, the Camp David Accords and the subsequent peace treaty he negotiated between Egypt and Israel, to his religiously inspired commitment to Israel and his broader hope for peace in the land of the Bible. Carter’s deep Christian faith informed much of his policymaking in the Middle East, from his tenacious desire to forge a peace agreement regardless of the political consequences, to his negotiating tactics with Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat.³

¹ *The Presidential Campaign 1976, Volume One, Part Two* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 977.

² *The Presidential Campaign, 1976, Volume One, Part One* (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 216-217.

³ For more on US-Israeli relations and US policies in the Arab-Israeli conflict prior to Carter’s presidency, see Ronald Radosh and Allis Radosh, *A Safe Haven: Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel* (New

The Bible was never far from Carter's mind when he spoke about Israel and the Middle East in negotiating sessions, foreign policy meetings, or public addresses. After leaving office, Carter wrote, "For me there is no way to approach or enter Israel without thinking first about the Bible and the history of the land and its people. The names and images have long been an integral part of my life as a Christian, but many of them took on a new and entirely different significance when I became President of the United States."⁴ National Security Council Middle East expert William Quandt echoed, "the president's religious orientation led him to a concern with the lands he had read so much about in the Bible."⁵

Carter had little personal experience of the Middle East and its peoples other than a 1973 trip to Israel. Future Carter Center director and historian Kenneth Stein described the impact visiting Israel had on Carter. "By visiting Israel, Carter aligned his deep biblical knowledge with the geographic reality he witnessed. His religious background

York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009); Michael T. Benson, *Harry S. Truman and the Founding of Israel* (Westport: Praeger, 1997); Isaac Alteras, *Eisenhower and Israel: US-Israeli Relations 1953-1960* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida), 1993; Warren Bass, *Support Any Friend: Kennedy's Middle East and the Making of the US-Israel Alliance* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004); Noam Kochavi, *Nixon and Israel: Forging a Conservative Partnership* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2010); Craig Daigle, *The Limits of Détente: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Arab-Israeli Conflict, 1969-1973* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012); and Patrick Tyler, *A World of Trouble: The White House and the Middle East—from the Cold War to the War on Terror* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2010).

⁴ Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 31.

⁵ William B. Quandt, *Camp David: Peacemaking and Politics* (Washington DC: The Brookings Institution, 1986), 30.

had given him a special feeling for the Holy Land and for the Jewish contribution to Christian tradition.”⁶

The president noted his “affinity” for Israel on multiple occasions during his presidential campaign and his time in office, declaring that “Jews who had survived the Holocaust deserved their own nation,” Israel as a “homeland for the Jews” was “compatible with the teachings of the Bible, hence ordained by God,” and “these moral and religious beliefs made my commitment to the security of Israel unshakable.”⁷ At other times, Carter strongly asserted, “I have an absolute, total commitment as a human being, as an American, as a religious person to Israel. Israel is the fulfillment of biblical prophecy.”⁸

However, Carter’s senior political advisor Hamilton Jordan told him that Israelis and American Jews had a “fear of this unknown Baptist named Jimmy Carter who has no public record on Israel to reassure them.”⁹ During the campaign, one Jewish official encapsulated this reticence to embrace Carter, “For over 2,000 years it has never been a good thing for Jews to have mystically religious Christians around—the Crusaders, the Spanish inquisitors are examples. Jews know Carter is no anti-Semite. He just makes some of us nervous.”¹⁰

⁶ Kenneth Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy: Sadat, Kissinger, Carter, Begin, and the Quest for Arab-Israeli Peace* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 36.

⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 274.

⁸ As cited in Paul Charles Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), 82.

⁹ Memo, “Jewish Identity, Zionism, and Israel,” n.d., “Foreign Policy/Domestic Politics Memo, HJ Memo, 6/77” folder, Box 34A, Office of Chief of Staff—Hamilton Jordan Confidential File, Jimmy Carter Library, Atlanta, Georgia (hereafter JCL).

¹⁰ As cited in Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel*, 82.

Political scientist Paul Charles Merkley, a Jewish scholar, criticized Carter for assuming his Sunday School knowledge of Israel and its biblical history was all he needed to know about the modern Jewish state and its people. He contrasted the close relationship between Carter and Sadat with the friction between Carter and Begin, reasoning Sadat represented an exotic culture while Begin came from a society very familiar to Carter (or at least so he believed). Merkley mockingly declared, “Anyone who paused to put on a turban could command [Carter’s] respectful attention forever.”¹¹

Furthermore, Carter had little experience with American Jews at that point in his political career. His sister Gloria married a Jew, but he did not have many close Jewish social connections. Stuart Eizenstat, Carter’s domestic affairs advisor and an American Jew himself, concurred, “I wouldn’t say Carter felt uncomfortable in the Jewish crowds, but it clearly was not his element. After all, he was not a northern or northeastern politician who had grown up in a heavily Jewish population. Yes, he knew Jews in Atlanta, but they were not part of his circle.”¹²

Carter’s lack of Washington experience prior to becoming president also meant that he lacked familiarity with the pro-Israel and American Jewish lobbies, political forces absent in Georgia state politics. In a memo to Carter, Jordan compared the administration’s lack of understanding of the American Jewish lobby to the campaign team’s failure to grasp the power of the American labor movement among Democrats.¹³

¹¹ Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel*, 106.

¹² As cited in Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 35-36.

¹³ Peter Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 401.

However, Harold Saunders, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, explained that Carter's unfamiliarity with the American Jewish lobby helped him see new opportunities and try fresh approaches in the Middle East.¹⁴

Carter's limited experience in the region rested entirely with Israel and its American Jewish supporters. He had practically no experience with Arabs outside of meeting an Arab man at a Florida racetrack.¹⁵ Carter himself admitted that upon entering office, "I had no strong feelings about the Arab countries. I had never visited one and knew no Arab leaders."¹⁶ However, biographer Peter Bourne explained Carter "felt that because, unlike Israel, Arab leaders had little or no organized constituency in the United States to lobby their cause, it was incumbent on him to expose himself thoroughly to their point of view."¹⁷

Carter's broader concern about human rights also reached to the Palestinians living in the Israeli-controlled West Bank, a situation he described as "contrary to the basic moral and ethical principles of both [Israel and the United States]."¹⁸ However, Carter did not recognize until later in his administration how much other Arab countries marginalized the Palestinians or how deeply the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO)

¹⁴ Robert A. Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 203-204.

¹⁵ Quandt, *Camp David*, 30-31.

¹⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 274-275.

¹⁷ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 401.

¹⁸ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 277.

opposed Israel's existence. In his memoirs, he subtly summed up the situation, "The record of the Arab nations themselves toward the Palestinians left much to be desired."¹⁹

Despite his limited knowledge of the region and its players, Carter launched a self-described "vigorous" pursuit of a comprehensive settlement among all the parties, something that past presidents had decided was not worth the energy or political capital.²⁰ Stein remarked that Carter's determination to achieve a peace agreement in the Middle East "was more than stubbornness; it was a combination of persistence mixed with what he determined to be the 'right thing' to do. Carter was guided by his own moral compass in deriving workable formulas for policy making."²¹

Carter's advisors frequently counseled him to temper his expectations for success in achieving such a peace settlement, a situation that constantly frustrated a committed Carter.²² Secretary of State Cyrus Vance recalled, "Carter unflinchingly refused to take the easy course on politically sensitive foreign policy matters."²³ National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski remembered the tension in Carter between his religious attachment to Israel and his frustration with the Israelis in peace negotiations:

Occasionally Carter would also say that he would be willing to lose the Presidency for the sake of genuine peace in the Middle East, and I think he was sincere. Perhaps most importantly, Carter's feelings on Israel were always ambivalent. On the one hand, he felt that Israel was being

¹⁹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 36-38; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 276.

²⁰ Jimmy Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land: A Plan That Will Work* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 27-28; Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel*, 92-93.

²¹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 38.

²² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 278; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 39-40.

²³ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America's Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 163.

intransigent; on the other, he genuinely did have an attachment to the country as “the land of the Bible,” and he explicitly disassociated himself from the more critical anti-Israeli view.²⁴

Early in his administration, Carter scheduled a series of visits with the various leaders of the Middle Eastern countries involved in the dispute. He wanted to gain an understanding of the different points of view and seek common ground as the basis for a comprehensive settlement at the Geneva Conference. Due to the “special” relationship between the United States and Israel, he first met with Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in March 1977. Before the prime minister arrived, Brzezinski advised Carter to use the American special bond with Israel by applying pressure on Rabin to compromise on territorial concessions to prevent any deterioration in US-Israeli relations.

During this meeting, Carter and Brzezinski’s policy conversation drifted to a wide-ranging discussion of religion including topics such as the exact burial location of Jesus, the religious lives of their children, and a broad discussion of whether religion constituted a search or an answer. This intimate conversation was an excellent example of how Carter’s mind frequently turned to broader issues of religion when he discussed American policy toward Israel.²⁵

Ultimately, the meetings between Carter and Rabin faltered because the Israeli prime minister resented the president’s rather public discussions about the possible outlines of a comprehensive peace settlement. In his mind, national leaders and diplomats

²⁴ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1983), 97.

²⁵ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 88-90.

usually discussed such details in private conversations.²⁶ Carter remembered the meetings as “a particularly unpleasant surprise” and remembered “looking forward to seeing if [Arab leaders] are more flexible than Rabin.”²⁷ Brzezinski recalled that Carter tried to build a personal relationship with Rabin by discussing his interest in biblical sites and by inviting him to go to the private residence and check on Carter’s sleeping daughter, Amy. Rabin rebuffed Carter’s efforts.²⁸

Whereas Carter failed to build a personal rapport with Rabin, he succeeded in spectacular fashion in building a close, lifelong friendship with Egyptian leader Anwar Sadat. Both Carter and Sadat sought to build a close relationship before ever meeting each other.²⁹ During the 1976 election, Sadat told American Ambassador to Egypt Hermann Eilts that he preferred Gerald Ford’s re-election because of his familiarity with Ford, but confided that Carter “must not be all that bad” due to his deep religious convictions.³⁰ Prior to his April meeting with Carter, Sadat told Egyptian Ambassador to the United States Ashraf Ghorbal that the new president’s faith gave them a common bond on which Sadat hoped to build a relationship.³¹ Sadat even read an Arabic

²⁶ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 193.

²⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 280; Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 22.

²⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 90.

²⁹ For an examination of US-Egyptian relations and a trajectory of modern Egyptian history, see Lloyd C. Gardner, *The Road to Tahrir Square: Egypt and the United States from the Rise of Nasser to the Fall of Mubarak* (New York: The New Press, 2011) and Steven A. Cook, *The Struggle for Egypt: From Nasser to Tahrir Square* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

³⁰ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 195.

³¹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 36.

translation of Carter's campaign biography *Why Not the Best?* to prepare for their first encounter.³²

Carter's advisors counseled him to establish a good rapport with the Egyptian president who wanted a closer relationship with the United States. Vance advised Carter, "it will be important that Sadat leave Washington feeling a sense of personal trust in you. To this end, listening to Sadat's views will be as important as frank explanation of our own views and intentions and our reasons for holding them."³³ White House speechwriter Jim Fallows described to Carter the common rural background and commitment to small town faith that both men shared as a basis for forming a close bond.³⁴

Carter and Sadat spent ample time spelling out their respective positions regarding the Geneva Conference. More important, they forged a deep friendship that historian Gaddis Smith described as the closest relationship between an American president and a foreign leader since Franklin D. Roosevelt and Winston Churchill.³⁵ Eilts later explained, "Sadat was mesmerized by Carter, a personal relationship of unprecedented proportions which I had not seen before."³⁶

³² Memo, Jim Fallows to Jimmy Carter, "Sadat Visit: Welcoming Statement," March 31, 1977, "Egypt, President Sadat, 4/4-5/77: Briefing Book" folder, Box 3, Office of National Security Advisor—VIP Visit File, JCL.

³³ Memo, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, "Official Working Visit by Egyptian President Anwar Sadat," March 25, 1977, NLC-128-11-19-2-5, Remote Archives Capture Project (hereafter RAC Project), JCL.

³⁴ Memo, Jim Fallows to Jimmy Carter, "Sadat Visit: Toast," March 31, 1977, "Egypt, President Sadat, 4/4-5/77: Briefing Book" folder, Box 3, Office of National Security Advisor—VIP Visit File, JCL.

³⁵ Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 161.

³⁶ As cited in Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 196.

In his memoirs, Carter described his first meeting with Sadat as if “a shining light burst on the Middle East scene for me.” He told Rosalynn, “this had been my best day as President,” and she and Sadat’s wife, Jihan, formed a close friendship that mirrored their husbands’ relationship.³⁷ Carter even expressed his fondness for Sadat to his top foreign policy advisors, telling Brzezinski, “Sadat was like a brother.”³⁸

Carter valued Sadat’s devotion to Islam, noticing “a callused spot at the center of his forehead, apparently caused by a lifetime of touching his head to the ground in prayer.”³⁹ Carter’s close relationship with Sadat also expanded the horizons of his Christian faith. He later reflected: “His references to the patriarch caused me to reexamine the ancient biblical story of Abraham and his early descendants, looking at their adventures for the first time from a Jewish, a Christian, and an Arab point of view simultaneously.”⁴⁰

Despite the success Carter achieved in forging a close relationship with Sadat, the administration’s peace process calculus dramatically changed when the right-wing Likud coalition won a majority in the Israeli parliamentary elections. Longtime opposition leader and former pre-independence paramilitary leader Menachem Begin became prime minister.⁴¹ American intelligence had already speculated that the Israeli Labor coalition

³⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 282, 284.

³⁸ As cited in Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 196. Brzezinski and Eizenstat were skeptical of their friendship. They later told Stein in interviews that they believed “Sadat played Carter like a violin.”

³⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 282.

⁴⁰ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 5.

⁴¹ For more on Begin’s political background and experience in the Revisionist Zionist movement, see Eran Kaplan, *The Jewish Radical Right: Revisionist Zionism and Its Ideological Legacy* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2005) and Colin Shindler, *The Triumph of Military Zionism: Nationalism and the Origins of the Israeli Right* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2010).

that had governed Israel since its independence was in an extremely tenuous position after being caught off guard by the surprise Arab attacks of the 1973 October War and suffering a series of corruption scandals.⁴² Carter's public statements about a "Palestinian homeland" and his frosty relationship with Rabin further weakened the Labor coalition in the eyes of Israeli voters concerned about Israeli-American relations.⁴³

Like Carter and Sadat, Begin was extremely devout in his spiritual practices. Begin attracted votes from the rapidly growing Sephardic population, religious nationalist groups such as Gush Emunim, and other religious parties previously affiliated with the Labor coalition by his rhetoric and public religious observances.⁴⁴ Rabbi Meir Kahane, leader of Kach, the most extreme religious nationalist party in Israel, rejoiced over Begin's election, "For the first time since its establishment, the State of Israel has as its prime minister potential a man who thinks like a Jew, acts like a Jew, faces television with a yarmulke on his head, and actually speaks the 'one little word' [God] that we have waited to hear from the lips of Ben-Gurion, Sharett, Eshkol, Golda, Rabin, and Peres."⁴⁵ One of Begin's aides pointed to the new prime minister's legacy as part of his electoral victory: "He is the only remaining leader who lived the Israeli saga from the Holocaust

⁴² "Israel: Assessment of the Internal Political Situation," January 17, 1977, NLC-17-111-6-2-2, RAC Project, JCL.

⁴³ Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 78.

⁴⁴ Ian S. Lustick, *For the Land and the Lord: Jewish Fundamentalism in Israel* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations, 1988), 56.

⁴⁵ As cited in Ehud Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel's Radical Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 68-69.

through the fight against the British and the wars against the Arabs. He is the last of the last. He has history in his veins.”⁴⁶

Carter admitted a sense of shock in Begin’s election and confessed, “none of us knew what to expect.”⁴⁷ A few days later, Carter watched a rerun of an *Issues and Answers* interview with Begin and wrote in his diary, “It was frightening to watch his adamant position on issues [such as Israeli control of the West Bank] that must be resolved if a Middle Eastern peace settlement is going to be realized.”⁴⁸ However, in his memoirs, he recalled that despite his fears, “I still had some hope, though, because Begin was said to be an honest and courageous man.”⁴⁹

The Carter administration immediately began discussing how to proceed with their plans for negotiating a comprehensive settlement at the Geneva Conference after Begin’s surprising electoral victory. Several administration officials saw an opportunity in Begin’s victory to pursue a peace settlement not possible with a Labor-dominated government. Brzezinski counseled Carter, “Begin, by his extremism, is likely to split both Israeli public opinion and the American Jewish community. A position of moderate firmness on your part will rally to you in time both the Israeli opposition and significant portions of the American Jewish community, including its responsible leadership.”⁵⁰

⁴⁶ Joseph Kraft, “Talking to a Man with History in His Veins,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 6, 1977.

⁴⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 284.

⁴⁸ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), 55-56.

⁴⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 288.

⁵⁰ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Weekly National Security Report #13,” May 20, 1977, “Weekly Reports [to the President], 1-15: [2/77-6/77]” folder, Box 41, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

However, not everyone agreed. White House Counsel Robert Lipshutz, an American Jew, cautioned Carter against being too optimistic about influencing the Israeli prime minister. “[Begin] believes at this time,” Lipshutz explained, “that he can ‘convince’ you and your Administration, as well as the Congress and American public, that his assessment of the situation in the Middle East and his ideas about resolving the problems are correct.”⁵¹

At a May 26 press conference, Carter directly addressed a question about how Begin’s election affected his plans to pursue a comprehensive peace settlement. Carter tactfully answered, “I think a large part of that question can be resolved when I meet with [Begin] personally and when he meets with the congressional leaders and with the Jewish Americans who are very deeply interested in this and sees the purpose of our own country. I think this may have an effect on him.”⁵²

Throughout June, Carter and his advisors studied Begin and the possibilities and limitations of negotiating with the new Israeli government before a July meeting between the president and the new prime minister. Quandt noted the absence of a good biography of Begin. Moreover, administration officials believed that Begin lacked a commitment to the territorial maximalism he had espoused in his public record spanning across three decades.⁵³

⁵¹ Memo, Robert Lipshutz to Jimmy Carter, “Israel Election and Related Matter,” May 23, 1977, “5/23/77 [2]” folder, Box 26, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

⁵² Jimmy Carter, “The President’s News Conference,” May 26, 1977, in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7587>.

⁵³ Quandt, *Camp David*, 66.

Officials searched far and wide for information. Brzezinski provided Carter with some excerpts from the book *Terror Out of Zion*, the most widely read book about Begin in the administration. The book recounted the history of Irgun, the anti-British paramilitary organization that Begin led before Israel declared its independence. Brzezinski hoped to give the president some extra insight into Begin's background through these excerpts.⁵⁴

Beyond writings, Brzezinski advised Carter that Begin might be intransigent on the notion of exchanging West Bank lands for peace.⁵⁵ At a June 10 meeting, Carter's foreign policy team discussed ways to discourage Begin's government from doing anything too provocative, such as formally annexing the West Bank, while avoiding the appearance of excessive intervention in internal Israeli affairs.⁵⁶

In preparation for Begin's impending visit, Fallows pointed out that Carter and Begin "share[d] many personal qualities" such as their religion and even recommended verses from the prophet Isaiah that might be useful in their meetings.⁵⁷ American Ambassador to Israel Samuel W. Lewis prepared a personality assessment of Begin for

⁵⁴ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Terror Out of Zion," June 10, 1977, "Israel: 4-6/77" folder, Box 34, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

⁵⁵ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Information Items," June 10, 1977, NLC-1-2-8-57-8, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Information Items," June 20, 1977, NLC-1-2-6-46-2, RAC Project, JCL.

⁵⁶ Memo, William Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Discussion Paper for PRC Meeting on the Middle East, June 10, 1977," June 6, 1977, "Meetings—PRC 17: 6/10/77" folder, Box 24, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; "Discussion Paper for the PRC Meeting on Middle East," June 10, 1977, NLC-132-61-6-2-9, RAC Project, JCL.

⁵⁷ Memo, Jim Fallows to Jimmy Carter, "Begin Arrival," July 16, 1977, "Israel, Prime Minister Begin, 7/19-20/77: Briefing Book" folder, Box 6, Office of National Security Advisor—VIP Visit File, JCL. He suggested the following verses: Isaiah 52:7 ("How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace.") and Isaiah 32:18 ("And the work of righteousness shall be peace; and the effects of righteousness, quietness and assurance forever.")

Carter's foreign policy team entitled, "Begin: Moses or Samson," alluding to Begin's penchant to see current events through the prism of ancient Hebrew history.⁵⁸ Finally, on the eve of Begin's visit, Brzezinski told Carter, "Begin eventually might be better able than the Israeli Labor Party to deliver the concessions necessary for peace," using a logic similar to "only Nixon could go to China."⁵⁹

Upon Begin's arrival, Carter delivered an eloquent welcoming speech, commenting on Begin's "deep and unswerving religious commitments," praising his decision to admit a group of Vietnamese boat people into Israel as part of the Jewish biblical tradition of hospitality to strangers. He closed with Fallows's suggestion of quoting Isaiah 32:18.⁶⁰ Carter wrote in his diary that evening, "We welcomed Prime Minister and Mrs. Begin from Israel. There have been dire predictions that he and I would not get along, but I found him to be quite congenial, dedicated, sincere, and deeply religious."⁶¹

Just as Sadat had developed a friendship with Carter on their respective deep religious convictions, Begin hoped to find support for his policies from Carter because of the president's evangelical faith. Begin bluntly told one Israeli newspaper, "Carter knows the Bible, and that will make it easier for him to know whose land this is."⁶² After

⁵⁸ Memo, William Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Background on Begin," July 15, 1977, "Israel, Prime Minister Begin, 7/19-20/77: Cables and Memos, 6/21/77-7/15/77" folder, Box 6, Office of National Security Advisor—VIP Visit File, JCL.

⁵⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 99.

⁶⁰ Jimmy Carter, "Visit of Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel Remarks of the President and Prime Minister at the Welcoming Ceremony," July 19, 1977, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7825>.

⁶¹ Carter, *White House Diary*, 71.

⁶² As cited in Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel*, 103-104.

Carter's welcoming speech, Begin responded in Hebrew with the following greeting, "Mr. President, I have come from the land of Zion and Jerusalem as the spokesman for an ancient people and a young nation. God's blessing on America, the hope of the human race. Peace to your great nation."⁶³ Later at a state dinner, Begin used religious rhetoric to describe the post-Holocaust generation: "I am not ashamed to say that I do believe with all my heart in divine providence. Were it not for divine providence, where would be today or tonight? We were sentenced to death, all of us, and the life of every one of us is a present."⁶⁴

In their private meetings, Carter primarily listened to Begin and tried to establish a personal rapport similar to the one he shared with Sadat. Carter made handwritten notes describing Begin as "religious" and quoting the same Isaiah verse from his welcoming address to frame contentious discussions in a positive manner based on their common religious values.⁶⁵ Begin responded by reciting the history of the Jews and how faith sustained them in the Diaspora for centuries. Carter wryly recalled Begin's lecture on Jewish history "was interesting this time, although I was familiar with most of what he said from my studies of the Old Testament and more recent history. I had no idea then how many times in the future I would listen to the same discourse."⁶⁶

⁶³ Jimmy Carter, "Visit of Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel Remarks of the President and Prime Minister at the Welcoming Ceremony," July 19, 1977, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7825>.

⁶⁴ Jimmy Carter, "Visit of Prime Minister Begin of Israel Toasts of the President and the Prime Minister at a Working Dinner for the Prime Minister," July 19, 1977, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=7832>.

⁶⁵ Jimmy Carter Handwritten Notes, July 19, 1977, "7/19/77" folder, Box 39, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

⁶⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 291; Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 8.

To reiterate his point, Begin even brought maps of the West Bank to the meeting, although he insisted on calling the land by its biblical names of Judea and Samaria. Quandt observed that Carter and his team did not quite understand that from the beginning, “History and religion were at the heart of [Begin’s] claim to these areas, not just security.”⁶⁷

Brzezinski considered the first meeting between Begin and Carter “personally cordial,” but “it did little to advance the prospects for peace” because Begin shifted the peace process discussion “away from issues of substance to issues of procedure.”⁶⁸ However, Carter succeeded in establishing a personal rapport with Begin. As Stein explained, “Though the political distance about the future of the territories might have been greater between Carter and Begin than between Carter and Rabin, the personal warmth between Carter and Begin more than neutralized that gap.”⁶⁹ *Christian Century* editor and Carter supporter James Wall wrote the president about comments Begin made at a breakfast with the press during his trip, “[He] referred to your ‘good heart, extraordinary intelligence, ability to make decisions, and quiet moral authority.’”⁷⁰

Carter also learned some lessons that he would apply in his future discussions with Begin. He quickly discovered that Begin considered silence tacit consent, when Begin surprised Carter by announcing to the press that Carter accepted his views after the

⁶⁷ Quandt, *Camp David*, 65.

⁶⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 101.

⁶⁹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 201.

⁷⁰ Letter, James Wall to Jimmy Carter, July 22, 1977, “7/22/77” folder, Box 40, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

president had politely listened to Begin's Jewish history lecture.⁷¹ Carter also realized he needed to hold a firmer line with Begin because he heard through sources that the prime minister had described him as a "cream puff."⁷²

The Carter administration made little progress toward pushing all the concerned parties to Geneva in the early fall because of Israel's military incursion into southern Lebanon and the fallout from the joint US-Soviet communiqué about the multilateral Geneva Conference.⁷³ In late October, Carter sent a handwritten letter to Sadat urging him to make a daring move to help break the deadlock. In early November, Sadat announced his intentions to visit Jerusalem and meet with Israeli political leaders. These new circumstances forced the Carter administration to alter its strategy and ultimately abandon the Geneva Conference to take advantage of this historic moment.⁷⁴

Sadat's decision to go to Jerusalem certainly qualified as a bold maneuver because it symbolized Egypt's implicit recognition of Israel as a legitimate state, a departure from the historic Arab refusal to recognize Israel's right to exist. Scholars retrospectively offered varying interpretations of Sadat's maneuver including viewing it as a response to Carter's letter, a move to keep the Soviets out of the peace process after the communiqué, a tactic to further build a special relationship with the United States

⁷¹ Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 199.

⁷² Quandt, *Camp David*, 83n22.

⁷³ Jimmy Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 44-45; Quandt, *Camp David*, 122; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 217.

⁷⁴ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 110.

similar to the shah's Iran, and a show of frustration with the procedural impasses of reconvening the Geneva Conference.⁷⁵

Sadat's announcement surprised many in the Carter administration who had focused on solving all the procedural problems preventing meetings in Geneva. Quandt explained that "it took some weeks" for Carter and his team to fully understand Sadat's decision, noting a lack of comprehension of the Arab world, especially the strained relationship between Egypt and Syria.⁷⁶ Some American officials even debated the possibility of convincing Sadat to postpone his Jerusalem trip to focus on Geneva. Lewis later recalled, "Washington feared that Sadat was going to give away the Palestinian cause, pay lip service to them, and feared that Begin would buy him off with Sinai."⁷⁷

Despite American apprehension, Sadat traveled to Israel for the weekend of November 19-21. On Sunday, Carter attended a special early morning service dedicated to praying for peace at First Baptist Church in Washington DC. As he left the church and returned to the White House to watch Sadat's speech to the Knesset on television, one reporter asked him, "Could you tell us how your prayer for peace in the Middle East went? What was your prayer, Mr. President?" In his reply, Carter underscored the deep religious convictions of both Sadat and Begin and his private pledges to pray for each. Another reporter, probably still unsure about what Carter's evangelical faith entailed, asked, "You see the hand of God moving in all of this, don't you?" The president simply

⁷⁵ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 403; Lloyd C. Gardner, *The Road to Tahrir Square*, 114; William B. Quandt, *Peace Process: American Diplomacy and the Arab-Israeli Conflict since 1967*, third edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 189; Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 13.

⁷⁶ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 192.

⁷⁷ As cited in Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 232.

answered, “We do have this common religious bond that at least provides a possible avenue for peace if we can remove the obstacles men create.”⁷⁸

To deflect Arab criticism of his trip, Sadat’s address to the Knesset spelled out most of the Arabs’ maximum demands, which were unacceptable to Israel. However, Carter pointed to the symbolic importance of Sadat’s presence rather than the speech’s content. He later wrote, “The meaning of the words themselves was muted by the fact that he was standing there alone, before his ancient enemies, holding out an olive branch.”⁷⁹

Aside from his address, Sadat toured many religious sites around Israel including Yad Vashem, the Israeli Holocaust memorial; the Dome of the Rock mosque, the site of Muhammad’s ascension; and the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, the site of Jesus Christ’s crucifixion and resurrection.⁸⁰ Begin and Sadat spent a significant amount of time together building a relationship. On one occasion during the trip, Begin wittily remarked, “One day, God willing, I shall visit Cairo, and I shall also go to see the Pyramids. After all, we helped to build them.”⁸¹

Sadat sincerely believed the Israelis would reciprocate with a grand gesture in response to his historic trip. After returning to Cairo, he told Eilts, “We will be in Geneva

⁷⁸ Jimmy Carter, “Visit of President Anwar al-Sadat to Israel Informal Exchange with Reporters on Departure from the First Baptist Church,” November 20, 1977, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=6950>.

⁷⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 297.

⁸⁰ “Worshippers Cheer Sadat as He Prays at Mosque,” *Los Angeles Times*, November 18, 1977; Benny Morris, *Righteous Victims: A History of the Zionist-Arab Conflict, 1881-2001* (New York: Vintage Books, 2001), 452.

⁸¹ As cited in Gardner, *The Road to Tahrir Square*, 145.

in two weeks. You'll see, I have done it."⁸² On the eve of Sadat's arrival in Jerusalem, State Department officials cautiously concurred with Sadat: "Begin and [Israeli Foreign Minister Moshe] Dayan undoubtedly realize that they cannot send Sadat home empty-handed."⁸³

However, Israeli officials never felt obligated to make a historic move in response to Sadat's trip. Several years later, Israeli Defense Minister Ezer Weizman privately told Sadat, "Do you really imagine that because of [your Jerusalem visit] we can place all our trust in your hands? Today, you are president, and tomorrow not. Israel's existence cannot be dependent upon you."⁸⁴

Sadat gained popularity among many Egyptians and Americans and tremendous worldwide appreciation for his goodwill gesture among Jews. His trip prompted American officials to find ways to capitalize on this historic initiative without it being solely a bilateral Egyptian-Israeli deal.⁸⁵ Brzezinski recollected, "I believed that if we were to move forward on the basis of the Sadat-Begin initiative, we should find some ways of making sure that progress on the West Bank was also generated."⁸⁶

As a result of Sadat's trip, the Egyptians and Israelis convened a series of meetings between lower-level officials, in order to negotiate political and military

⁸² As cited in Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 230.

⁸³ Memo, Alfred Atherton and Harold Saunders, "Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments No. 295," November 19, 1977, NLC-SAFE 39 B-35-5-2-5, RAC Project, JCL.

⁸⁴ As cited in Stein, *Heroic Diplomacy*, 239.

⁸⁵ "Summary of the 'New Realities,'" n.d., "Mid-East [CF, O/A 646]" folder, Box 49, Office of Chief of Staff—Hamilton Jordan Subject File, JCL; Memo, Alfred Atherton and Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, "Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments No. 296," November 20, 1977, NLC-SAFE 16 D-88-1-1-5, RAC Project, JCL.

⁸⁶ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 114.

matters. In mid-December, Begin traveled to Washington to confer with Carter about the prospects for peace following Sadat's visit and the ongoing Egyptian-Israeli talks. At Brzezinski's advice, Carter invoked the legacy of Begin's mentor, Ze'ev Jabotinsky, to encourage the prime minister to act boldly and not be so preoccupied with the details.⁸⁷

In response, Begin proposed the broad outlines of granting Palestinians living in the West Bank administrative autonomy and abolishing the ruling Israeli military government.⁸⁸ Brzezinski evaluated Begin's proposal and advised Carter, "I think he is genuinely groping for a truly historically significant solution, but is limited by his own zealotry in regards to 'Judea and Samaria.' Nonetheless, I do sense a real opportunity here."⁸⁹ Carter recalled his initial positive reaction to Begin's proposal in his memoirs, "Begin sounded much more flexible regarding the West Bank than I had expected, but I was to discover that his good words had multiple meanings, which my advisers and I did not understand at the time."⁹⁰

By the beginning of 1978, most people recognized a lack of progress in the bilateral talks. They clearly needed American mediation to build on Sadat's initiative.⁹¹ On January 20, Carter and Brzezinski discussed ways to break the impasse. They decided to invite Sadat for a visit in February to encourage him to persevere in the negotiations

⁸⁷ Carter, *White House Diary*, 151; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 299; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 116-117.

⁸⁸ Colin Shindler, *A History of Modern Israel* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 158.

⁸⁹ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Weekly National Security Report #40," December 16, 1977, "Weekly Reports [to the President], 31-41: [10/77-1/78]" folder, Box 41, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

⁹⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 300.

⁹¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 122; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 298.

despite his frustration with the lack of progress. During their meeting, they also explored, for the first time, the possibility of bringing both Sadat and Begin to Camp David for a series of intense, high-level negotiations personally mediated by Carter.⁹²

On February 2, Carter discussed the Middle East situation in his address to the National Prayer Breakfast, citing the deep religious commitments of both Begin and Sadat. He said, “I have a sense of confidence that if we emphasize and reinforce those ties of mutual faith and our subservience and humility before God and an acquiescence in his deeply sought guidance, that we can prevail.”⁹³ Many reporters found in that section of Carter’s speech evidence of the president viewing religion as the linchpin for solving the longstanding dispute.⁹⁴ However, not every reporter was so sanguine. Political scientist Malcolm Kerr opined, “godliness has had too much to do with bringing about the Middle East mess, and it is not likely to get us out of it. Each leader seems to be the prisoner of self-serving distinctions between his own sacred interests and the profane ones of his adversary.”⁹⁵

Just two days after Carter’s Prayer Breakfast remarks, the president spent the weekend with Sadat at Camp David. State Department Middle East experts predicted

⁹² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 240; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 305.

⁹³ Jimmy Carter, “National Prayer Breakfast Remarks at the 26th Annual Breakfast,” February 2, 1978, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=30006>.

⁹⁴ “Religion May Be Key to Mideast, Carter Believes,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 3, 1978; Terrence Smith, “Behind Sadat Peace Effort, Carter’s Deep Concern,” *New York Times*, February 3, 1978.

⁹⁵ Malcolm H. Kerr, “In the Middle East, It Takes More Than Prayer,” *Los Angeles Times*, February 12, 1978.

Sadat would push the United States to make a bold gesture similar to his Jerusalem trip or decide to distance himself from the stalled bilateral talks.⁹⁶

The experts' predictions were fairly accurate as Sadat expressed frustration with Begin. He planned to break off the ongoing political and military talks unless Carter could move the process forward. An exasperated Sadat believed he had met Israel's needs for direct negotiations with Arab leaders, recognition of Israel's right to exist, and peaceful relations with his Jerusalem trip, but the Israelis failed to reciprocate. He thought "his initiative to go to Jerusalem took the Israelis by surprise. They were not ready for peace and possibly still are not."⁹⁷ Carter reassured Sadat that the United States would push for a compromise and asked him to put forward a fairly tough peace proposal, so the United States could convince Egypt to moderate its proposal to extract concessions from Israel as well.⁹⁸

After shoring up Sadat's commitment to the peace process, Carter and his team planned for another series of meetings with Begin and his advisors. The major contentious issue remained UN Resolution 242. The Carter administration interpreted the resolution as requiring Israel to withdraw "on all fronts" with minor modifications agreed upon by all parties in negotiations. In contrast, Begin excluded withdrawal from the West Bank and Gaza in his interpretation of Resolution 242. Vance and Brzezinski both

⁹⁶ Memo, Sidney Sober and Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, "Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments No. 364," February 2, 1978, NLC-25-109-6-9-9, RAC Project, JCL.

⁹⁷ Carter, *White House Diary*, 169; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 243; Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Meeting with President Anwar Sadat," February 4, 1978, "Serial Xs—8/77-8/78" folder, Box 36, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

⁹⁸ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 196.

advised Carter to clearly articulate the American position on 242, so Begin could not claim misunderstanding as he had done in the past.⁹⁹

In their first meeting, Carter pressed Begin for more specifics about the autonomy proposal he had outlined in December. One of the talking points he jotted down on his scratch pad in preparation for the discussion was a reminder for Begin and his autonomy proposal that the “pursuit of justice” was “characteristic of Jews.”¹⁰⁰ Carter asked if the Palestinians living in the West Bank could decide after the five year transitional period to join Jordan, but Begin saw his administrative autonomy proposal as only applying to individuals rather than territory.¹⁰¹ Frustrated, Carter summed up the situation for his Israeli visitors, “In my view, the obstacle to peace, to a peace treaty with Egypt, is Israel’s determination to keep political control over the West Bank and Gaza, not just now, but to perpetuate it even after five years. This might cause us to lose the opportunity for peace that you want.”¹⁰²

The two sides met again the next day and continued the previous day’s discussion. Carter outlined his understanding of the Israeli position and asked Begin to clarify if he misunderstood any element. The president described the Israeli position as being unwilling to withdraw from the West Bank, to stop the expansion of settlements, to

⁹⁹ Memo, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, “The Begin Visit and Beyond,” March 9, 1978, “Israel 1-3/78” folder, Box 35, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Information Items,” March 9, 1978, NLC-1-5-5-37-0, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁰⁰ Jimmy Carter Handwritten Notes, March 21, 1978, “3/21/78” folder, Box 77, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁰¹ Moshe Dayan, *Breakthrough: A Personal Account of the Egypt-Israel Peace Negotiations* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1981), 125.

¹⁰² Memorandum of Conversation, “President’s Meeting with Prime Minister Begin,” March 21, 1978, “Serial Xs—8/77-8/78” folder, Box 36, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

withdraw existing settlers from the Sinai Peninsula, to acknowledge the applicability of Resolution 242 to the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and to let the Palestinians determine their political future. Carter recorded Begin's reaction in his diary, "Begin said this was a negative way to express their position, but didn't deny the accuracy of any of it."¹⁰³

After two days, National Security Council staff members considered the meetings a success because the president had strongly stated the American views on Resolution 242 to Begin to prevent any confusion.¹⁰⁴ They also advised Brzezinski, "[Begin] intends to ignore us as much as possible. Having found that he cannot easily work with us or gain our endorsement for his proposals, but not wanting an open break, he seems determined to listen politely and then do precisely what he wants."¹⁰⁵ The press even reported Begin's intransigence, "American policymakers have simply come reluctantly to a realization that Mr. Begin's bargaining position is not an opening bid but a matter of religious belief."¹⁰⁶

Several weeks later, Begin returned to the United States for a White House reception celebrating the thirtieth anniversary of Israel's statehood. At the event, Carter reiterated a sentiment from his presidential campaign, declaring, "The establishment of the nation of Israel is a fulfillment of Biblical prophecy and the very essence of its

¹⁰³ Memorandum of Conversation, "President's Meeting with Prime Minister Begin," March 22, 1978, "Serial Xs—8/77-8/78" folder, Box 36, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; Carter, *White House Diary*, 180.

¹⁰⁴ Memo, Middle East to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Evening Report," March 22, 1978, NLC-10-10-1-16-1, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁰⁵ Memo, Middle East to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Evening Report," April 12, 1978, NLC-10-10-6-6-7, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁰⁶ "The Impasse with Mr. Begin," *Washington Post*, March 23, 1978.

fulfillment.”¹⁰⁷ Although Carter professed his love for Israel and his deep spiritual connection to the land, he felt an equally deep sense of frustration with Begin. He recorded in his diary his feelings from a brief meeting with Begin a few days after the reception, “[Begin’s] a small man with limited vision, and my guess is he will not take the necessary steps to bring peace to Israel—an opportunity that may never come again.”¹⁰⁸

Others shared Carter’s frustration with Begin’s intransigence and the slow pace of negotiations over the summer. Brzezinski counseled him that the United States and Egypt may have to wait for more moderate political forces in Israel to emerge to move the peace process past Begin’s insistence on retaining the West Bank.¹⁰⁹ Many Egyptians feared the lack of progress after Sadat’s Jerusalem visit and the continuing construction of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories.¹¹⁰

Despite all the frustration over the stalemated negotiations, Carter remained determined to forge an agreement between Israel and Egypt and make progress on resolving the Palestinian question. In late June, Carter met with his advisors and a group of senior-ranking Democrats to discuss the situation. Practically everyone advised him to

¹⁰⁷ Jimmy Carter, “30th Anniversary of the State of Israel Remarks of the President and Prime Minister Menachem Begin at a White House Reception,” May 1, 1978, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=30730>.

¹⁰⁸ Carter, *White House Diary*, 193.

¹⁰⁹ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Weekly National Security Report #61,” June 2, 1978, “Weekly Reports [to the President], 61-71: [6/78-9/78]” folder, Box 41, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

¹¹⁰ Memo, William Bowdler and Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, “Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments No. 475,” June 8, 1978, NLC-17-143-4-7-4, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, William Bowdler and Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, “Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments No. 484,” June 19, 1978, NLC-17-143-4-13-7, RAC Project, JCL.

“stay as aloof as possible from direct involvement in the Middle East negotiations; this is a losing proposition,” especially because it might cost Jewish votes in the upcoming midterm congressional elections. Carter recalled in his memoirs, “No one, including me, could think of a specific route to success, but everyone could describe a dozen logical scenarios for failure—and all were eager to do so. I slowly became hardened against them, and as stubborn as at any other time I can remember.”¹¹¹

Progress remained elusive despite Carter’s determination to achieve a solution. Talks at the foreign minister level at Leeds Castle and a trip to Israel and Egypt by Vice-President Walter Mondale made little difference, but indicated that both sides wished to continue negotiating. Mondale advised Carter to convene a meeting between Begin and Sadat in “a private, secluded place” to isolate them from domestic political pressures, an idea Carter and Brzezinski had mulled over earlier in January. He also urged Carter to consider such a strategy because “the issues were so grave and the necessary compromises were so difficult that lower-level diplomats could not achieve them.”¹¹²

Even Rosalynn Carter chimed in with some suggestions. She recalled that during a July afternoon walk at Camp David, her husband said, “It’s so beautiful here. I don’t believe anybody could stay in this place, close to nature, peaceful and isolated from the world, and still carry a grudge. I believe if I could get Sadat and Begin both here together, we could work out some of the problems between them, or at least we could learn to understand each other better and maybe make some progress.” However, she astutely

¹¹¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 315-317.

¹¹² Walter Mondale, *The Good Fight: A Life in Liberal Politics* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 209.

recognized the political risks and asked, “Are you willing to be the scapegoat?” He replied, “What else is new?”¹¹³

In early August, Carter decided to host Begin and Sadat at Camp David for a series of intense, private meetings to break the current impasse. He sent handwritten invitations to both, urging them to be discrete until everyone agreed to the meeting and they set a date.¹¹⁴

The Camp David Summit seemed like it might be the successful climax to a long process of peace talks, but considerable pessimism existed on all sides. While some Egyptians feared that the United States would cave to Israeli demands, some Israelis feared Carter would blackmail Begin with threats of cutting off economic and military assistance.¹¹⁵

Some noted the importance of religion. Journalist Wolf Blitzer speculated about how Carter’s faith might drive his desire to achieve an agreement, “[Carter] is said to feel that he was selected, in part, to become president at this particular point in time in order to achieve this elusive goal for all mankind.”¹¹⁶ However, Begin tried to tamp down such messianic expectations for the summit. “The fate of our nation does not depend on a

¹¹³ Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 238.

¹¹⁴ Letter, Jimmy Carter to Menachem Begin, August 3, 1978, “Middle East—Negotiations: (7/29/78-9/6/78]” folder, Box 13, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL; Letter, Jimmy Carter to Anwar Sadat, August 3, 1978, “Middle East—Negotiations: (7/29/78-9/6/78]” folder, Box 13, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

¹¹⁵ “What’s in peace for us?” *The Egyptian Gazette*, August 9, 1978; Paul Eidelberg, “Preparing for the pressure-cooker,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 16, 1978.

¹¹⁶ Wolf Blitzer, “Three-Ego Summit,” *Jerusalem Post*, August 11, 1978.

meeting—not at the King David or at Camp David,” Begin continued, “...the meeting at Camp David is very important, but we should not call it fateful.”¹¹⁷

Once all the parties agreed to meet at Camp David in mid-September, Carter plunged into intensive preparations for the meeting. Historian Gaddis Smith provided historical context for Carter’s preparation, “Not since Woodrow Wilson attended the Paris Peace Conference of 1919 had an American President thrown himself so deeply and personally into diplomatic negotiations.”¹¹⁸ The president instructed Vance and Brzezinski to prepare separate briefing books, so he could have multiple perspectives.¹¹⁹ Brzezinski warned Carter that while he and Sadat could not afford failure, Begin could leave the summit without any progress and not suffer any domestic political consequences.¹²⁰ The State Department prepared a briefing book entitled “The Pivotal Issue,” which discussed the difficulty of securing “linkage” between a bilateral Egyptian-Israeli peace agreement and developing a broad framework for the future of the West Bank and Gaza Strip.¹²¹

Of all the briefing book materials, Carter found the psychological profiles of Begin and Sadat most valuable because he planned to rely on his personal relationships

¹¹⁷ Memo, William Bowdler and Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, “Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments No. 538,” August 18, 1978, “Middle East: 7-9/78” folder, Box 51, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

¹¹⁸ Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 169.

¹¹⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 317.

¹²⁰ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Strategy for Camp David,” n.d., “Middle East—Negotiations: (7/29/78-9/6/78)” folder, Box 13, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

¹²¹ Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 144; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 198.

with both men to break the stalemate.¹²² In addition to the briefing books, he met with the American ambassadors to Egypt and Israel to gain their personal impressions of Begin and Sadat and learn more about the advisors in their respective entourages.¹²³ Quandt later explained, “Carter found himself in the role of psychotherapist, gently trying to explain to each man the problems of the other in the hope of overcoming fears and distrust.”¹²⁴

One of the most significant components of Carter’s psychological study of Begin and Sadat centered on religion. The president was committed to being sensitive to each man’s religious commitments and framing the goal of reaching a peace agreement in spiritual terms. He read Begin’s autobiography, *The Revolt*, to further understand the prime minister’s militant past as the leader of Irgun and his religious convictions about *Eretz Israel* (Greater Israel).¹²⁵ Carter even brought his personal annotated Bible to the summit and admitted he put it to use on a number of occasions in his talks with Begin.¹²⁶ He also studied the Koran to prepare for his discussions with Sadat because he had more familiarity with Judaism than Islam. During the summit, he frequently walked with Sadat around the Camp David compound and asked him questions about Islam.¹²⁷

¹²² Jimmy Carter, *Talking Peace: A Vision for the Next Generation* (New York: Puffin Books, 1995), 10-11; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 319-320; Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 144-145, 158.

¹²³ Carter, *White House Diary*, 215; Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 321; “Minutes of National Security Council Meeting,” September 1, 1978, NLC-17-2-1-5-5, RAC Project, JCL.

¹²⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, 4-5.

¹²⁵ Strong, *Working in the World*, 206.

¹²⁶ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 322.

¹²⁷ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 9.

In planning the conference, Carter “wanted to generate an atmosphere of informality” in hopes that “in the quiet and peaceful atmosphere of our temporary home, both Begin and Sadat would come to know and understand each other better.”¹²⁸ The president instructed his staff to house the Israeli and Egyptian delegations in alternating cabins “to encourage chance, informal encounters.”¹²⁹ To create more warmth between the two principal leaders, Rosalynn invited both Begin and Sadat’s wives to the summit, although Jihan Sadat stayed behind because of a sick grandchild.¹³⁰ To enhance the seclusion of the experience and prevent the negotiations from being conducted in public, Press Secretary Jody Powell served as the sole spokesman for the conference and the compound military personnel dominated to prevent civilian leaks to the press.¹³¹

In the weeks leading up to the summit, many pastors encouraged Carter to incorporate a call for prayer into the meeting and the president decided early on to pursue this possibility.¹³² Vance recalled, “Carter wanted at the outset to put the summit on a high plane, reflecting the deep religious faith and humane purposes of the three leaders.”¹³³ After both leaders had arrived at Camp David, Rosalynn suggested proposing

¹²⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 322, 329.

¹²⁹ David Landau, “Togetherness under the trees planned by Camp David hosts,” *Jerusalem Post*, September 6, 1978.

¹³⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 327-328.

¹³¹ Jody Powell, *The Other Side of the Story: Why the news is often wrong, unsupportable and unfair—an insider’s view by a former presidential press secretary* (New York: William Morrow and Company, 1984), 60-64.

¹³² Carter, *White House Diary*, 213; Letter, Reverend Harold Bredezen to Jimmy Carter, August 17, 1978, “Mid East: Camp David Summit, President’s Working Papers, 10/22/73-9/12/78” folder, Box 28, Plains File—Subject File, JCL; J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 177-178.

¹³³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 220.

a joint prayer statement. The president submitted the ideas to both leaders and Sadat immediately agreed. When the draft statement reached the Israeli delegation, Dayan quipped, “you will have to take off your hat for the Christians and your shoes for the Muslims—and then you’ll end up putting on a yarmulke for the Jews,” but Begin took the paper, began reviewing the statement line-by-line, and requesting word changes.¹³⁴

Rosalynn later remembered that the joint prayer statement was the first statement issued at the summit “and for a long time it was the only issue everybody agreed on.”¹³⁵

Historian Leo Ribuffo described the leaders’ “common interest in religion” as “a diplomatic lubricant” to find common ground during the Camp David Summit.¹³⁶ Early in the summit, Carter used faith to find a common ground between Begin and Sadat. In discussing these complicated territorial and security issues in later individual meetings with the two leaders, Carter frequently alluded to religion to appeal to their higher aspirations and to sort out the complex religious aspects of the conflict.

Before meeting with both principals together, Carter first met with Begin and Sadat separately. In his meeting with Begin on Tuesday evening, Carter encouraged the prime minister to work toward a better relationship with Sadat during the negotiations and outlined his role as a mediator, but Begin mainly addressed the sacrosanct status of “Judea and Samaria” and restated his earlier positions on the issues.¹³⁷

¹³⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 331; Dayan as cited in Strong, *Working in the World*, 205.

¹³⁵ Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 246.

¹³⁶ Leo P. Ribuffo, “God and Jimmy Carter,” in *Transforming Faith: The Sacred and Secular in Modern American History*, ed. M.L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 152.

¹³⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 332-338.

The next morning, Carter met with Sadat to discuss some of the same issues such as his role as mediator. During their discussion, Sadat described Begin as “bitter and inclined to look back in ancient history rather than deal with the present and the future,” but Carter stood up for the prime minister, responding that he “was a man of integrity and honor, with deep and long-standing opinions that were difficult for him to change.”¹³⁸

Later in the afternoon, Carter mediated the first joint meeting between Begin and Sadat. Demonstrating his attention to detail and concern for procedure, Begin quickly asked about the protocol for observing each religion’s holy day during the summit. The three men agreed that they would only abstain from formal summit meetings on Saturday, the Jewish Sabbath. Rosalynn later observed that while Sadat practiced the Islamic ritual of praying five times a day, he sometimes delayed a prayer to continue working because he considered labor sacred. To facilitate the worship services of the three different faiths, the Carters set up the Camp David movie theater to serve as mosque, synagogue, and chapel.¹³⁹

During this first joint meeting, Carter planned “to play a minimal role...so that the other two leaders could become better acquainted and have a more fruitful exchange.”¹⁴⁰ However, Carter planned to interject himself to move the conversation along. The president had two pages of handwritten notes for the meeting, including the sentence,

¹³⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 338-342.

¹³⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 343-344; Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, 237, 241.

¹⁴⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 343.

“First Egyptian-Jewish peace since time of ~~Joseph~~ Jeremiah.” Quandt remarked, “The Bible was never too far from Carter’s thoughts.”¹⁴¹

Before diving into the substantive issues in their first meeting, both Begin and Sadat invoked religious imagery as part of the larger effort to put the Camp David Summit on a higher plane. Carter recorded in his diary, “Begin made a comment that when the Catholics choose a pope, they said, *Habemus Papam*. He would like for us to say *Habemus Pacem*. Sadat said he hoped the spirit of King David, the great leader of Israel, would prevail at Camp David.”¹⁴²

After Begin’s initial statements, Sadat read a document that outlined the Egyptian proposal for an agreement. Carter had already seen the document, knew Sadat’s fallback negotiating positions, and warned Begin about the document’s rigidity in advance. In his memoirs, he recalled how Begin politely listened throughout Sadat’s presentation and thanked him for the hard work he put into the proposal.¹⁴³

Despite Begin’s polite remarks, considerable tension remained between the parties. To add some levity to the situation, Carter joked, “Well, Mr. Begin, it would save us a lot of time if you would just accept these terms.” All three men laughed. Begin responded in jest, “Mr. President, would you advise me to do so?”¹⁴⁴

Although the first meeting had ended on a humorous note, Carter realized there was a tremendous gap to close between the Egyptian and Israeli positions. On the third

¹⁴¹ As cited in Quandt, *Camp David*, 220.

¹⁴² Carter, *White House Diary*, 221.

¹⁴³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 345.

¹⁴⁴ As cited in Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 147.

day, Carter arranged to meet with Begin first, then with both leaders together, and finally with Sadat in the evening. In his private meeting with Begin, Carter implored the prime minister to be more transparent and flexible. Moreover, Carter sought to appeal to Begin's religious convictions and explained that his rigidity regarding the West Bank and Gaza was "contrary to the principles which had always been such an integral part of Jewish teachings and religious beliefs," a comment Begin surely resented.¹⁴⁵ However, Begin remained intransigent, prompting Carter to declare that he would resist Israeli pressure, commenting, "My reelection is not nearly as important to me as the resolution of the Middle East issue."¹⁴⁶

The second joint Begin-Sadat meeting proved extremely contentious as Begin forcefully addressed his concern with the Egyptian proposal on a point-by-point basis, even though Carter had privately assured him that this document constituted only Sadat's opening bargaining position. During an intense argument, Sadat criticized the Israeli invasion of southern Lebanon and Begin quickly interrupted to point out Israel acted "to save the Christians," while directly looking at Carter.¹⁴⁷

After breaking for lunch after the escalating shouting match, the three leaders reconvened to continue their tension-filled discussion. In an effort to move the focus back to the nobler aspirations for peace, Sadat said, "With success at Camp David, I still dream of a meeting on Mount Sinai of us three leaders, representing three nations and three

¹⁴⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 348-349.

¹⁴⁶ As cited in Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 257.

¹⁴⁷ As cited in Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 466.

religious beliefs. This is still my prayer to God!” Carter remembered that both he and Begin felt moved by Sadat’s sincerity.¹⁴⁸

At the end of the day, Carter met with Sadat and the Egyptian delegation who expressed frustration with the lack of progress. Carter proposed to Sadat that on some especially contentious issues such as Jerusalem, Egypt and Israel could agree to have different interpretations on the same document, much like the United States and China did with the Shanghai communiqué.¹⁴⁹ Throughout the first few days of the conference, Carter later recalled how much he “craved” opportunities to exercise, think, and pray during the breaks between these very contentious meetings.¹⁵⁰

After the third day and several “unpleasant encounters” between Begin and Sadat, Carter decided to negotiate with the two parties separately because his original hopes of building a relationship between the two leaders in the seclusion of Camp David no longer seemed possible.¹⁵¹ Over the course of the summit, Carter spent 27 ½ hours meeting with Sadat and 29 hours meeting with Begin. Of that time, Carter spent 9 hours alone with Sadat and six hours alone with Begin, with no aides or interpreters.¹⁵²

During many of those meetings, Carter admitted discussing with Begin and Sadat how their respective religions affected their individual lives as well as the contemporary

¹⁴⁸ As cited in Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 358.

¹⁴⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 360-363.

¹⁵⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 364.

¹⁵¹ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 43.

¹⁵² William Greider, “Can a Real Christian Make It as President?” *Washington Post Magazine*, November 5, 1978.

Middle Eastern conflict.¹⁵³ As Carter shuttled back and forth between meetings with each leader, he recollected, “I was to spend much of my time defending each of the leaders to the other. Carter devoted time to an explanation of both systems of government—the imperatives of political life for Begin in a democracy and the sensitive role Sadat had to play in representing, without their expressed approval, the interests of other Arabs.”¹⁵⁴

On the first Friday evening of the summit, Carter shared a special Sabbath meal with the Israeli delegation, replete with kosher food and religious ceremony. As he often did, Carter perceived that evening at Camp David through the lens of his Christian faith. In this case, his comparison proved unflattering to Begin and the other Israelis. He observed, “I could better understand the negative reaction when Jesus invited himself to supper with Zacchaeus, a sinful tax collector, and his friends. They were probably ‘birds of a feather’ who drank too much, told ribald stories, and rarely if ever went to a synagogue to worship.”¹⁵⁵

On Saturday, while the Israelis observed the Sabbath and the Egyptians worked to address Begin’s numerous concerns with their proposals, Carter and his negotiating team began preparing an American proposal to fill a void as a joint agreement appeared unlikely. Then Carter would meet with each side separately and use the single text of the American proposal as the basis for changes. While recognizing Begin had opposed any American settlement since he took office, Vance believed he “would also probably conclude that this [single text] approach would be the only way to get an agreement.

¹⁵³ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 8.

¹⁵⁴ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 340.

¹⁵⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Sources of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1997), 84-85.

Moreover, it would suit his negotiating style, which was to concentrate on the specific language of documents.”¹⁵⁶

Over the next few days, the Israelis and Egyptians haggled over the language of the American proposal, but they slowly made progress. On Tuesday evening, Begin met with Carter in what the prime minister described as “the most serious talk I have ever had in my life, except once when I discussed the future of Israel with Jabotinsky.”¹⁵⁷ Begin insisted that the framework the Americans proposed should not contain the language of UN Resolution 242 because it noted Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank.¹⁵⁸ He continued discussing Israeli settlements in biblical terms, at one point citing Psalm 137:5 to defend Israeli control over an undivided Jerusalem, “If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning.”¹⁵⁹

In response, Carter countered not with scripture, but public opinion polls. Without mentioning Jerusalem, Carter noted that a majority of Israelis favored abandoning settlements in the Sinai and substantially withdrawing from the West Bank and Gaza to achieve peace. He then told Begin that his position better represented the Israeli people better than the prime minister’s stance, a sentiment Begin surely resented.¹⁶⁰

Despite their contentious meeting, Begin and the Israelis stayed to continue the negotiations over the wording of the American proposal. On Friday, Vance told Carter

¹⁵⁶ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 219.

¹⁵⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 385-386.

¹⁵⁸ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 408-409.

¹⁵⁹ As cited in Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 386.

¹⁶⁰ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 386.

that Sadat planned to leave Camp David because Dayan told the Egyptian president that Israel would simply not compromise on some issues. Shocked by the news, Carter dismissed his staff from his cottage, “moved over to the window and looked out to the Catocin Mountains and prayed fervently for a few minutes that somehow we could find peace.”¹⁶¹ Then Carter went to Sadat’s cabin and invoked their friendship to implore him to stay for a few more days, and Sadat relented.¹⁶²

During the summit’s second week, Carter realized Begin and Sadat would not resolve the Palestinian issue in concrete fashion, so he refocused his attention on securing an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and a general framework to proceed on the issues of the West Bank and Gaza.¹⁶³ While the issues separating Egypt and Israel from a bilateral agreement narrowed, Begin’s refusal to evacuate Israeli settlers from the Sinai Peninsula proved the major obstacle. On Saturday, Begin offered a compromise, promising the Knesset would vote on the issue of the Sinai settlements within two weeks. Sadat consented, but the entire agreement would be contingent on the vote.¹⁶⁴

It seemed as if both sides had achieved a breakthrough, but a paragraph in the agreement about Jerusalem almost prompted Begin to walk out on the conference. Sadat wished for some sort of Muslim emblem or flag over the Dome of the Rock, but Begin firmly opposed the plan.¹⁶⁵

¹⁶¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 392.

¹⁶² Carter, *Talking Peace*, 15-16.

¹⁶³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 223.

¹⁶⁴ Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 410.

¹⁶⁵ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 225.

As Begin prepared to leave Camp David without an agreement, Carter used personal diplomacy. He brought copies of a photograph of the three leaders from the beginning of the conference, and he signed each copy, adding the name of one of Begin's grandchildren on each photograph. Begin became emotional and agreed to review Carter's latest revisions that omitted the paragraph on Jerusalem.¹⁶⁶

Ultimately, Begin agreed to Carter's suggested changes. The American president met with Sadat, telling him that they had finally arrived at a mutually acceptable settlement. In short, the Camp David Accords contained two separate agreements: a broad outline for an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty and a framework for Palestinian autonomy in Gaza and the West Bank. Carter promised Sadat to use American influence on Israel to create more linkage between the two agreements.¹⁶⁷ After Sadat agreed, Begin called him to congratulate him on their historic achievement and then walked over to his cottage to share a handshake. It marked the first contact between the two leaders in ten days.¹⁶⁸ At the signing ceremony for the Camp David Accords, Begin joked, "As far as my historic experience is concerned, I think that he worked harder than our forefathers did in Egypt building the pyramids."¹⁶⁹

The Camp David Accords produced an instant variety of reactions among Christians, Muslims, and Jews. Maranatha Baptist Church, a new congregation in

¹⁶⁶ Carter, *Talking Peace*, 17.

¹⁶⁷ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 226.

¹⁶⁸ Morris, *Righteous Victims*, 471.

¹⁶⁹ Jimmy Carter, "Remarks of the President, President Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt, and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel at the Conclusion of the Camp David Meeting on the Middle East," September 17, 1978, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=29787>.

Carter's hometown of Plains, sent a message congratulating the president on his landmark achievement with one member writing a note, "We always knew it would take a born-again Christian to do what you did."¹⁷⁰ Other American evangelicals were not so sanguine. Fundamentalist preacher Jerry Falwell declared, "In spite of the rosy and utterly unrealistic expectations by our government, this treaty will not be a lasting treaty... You and I know that there's not going to be any real peace in the Middle East until the Lord Jesus sits down upon the throne of David in Jerusalem."¹⁷¹

While many Egyptians applauded the agreement, Arabs in other countries felt the agreements constituted the betrayal that began with Sadat's visit to Jerusalem.¹⁷² Not all Egyptians accepted the agreement either, as religious nationalists in organizations such as the Muslim Brotherhood ultimately assassinated Sadat for his decision to make peace with Israel.¹⁷³

Religious Zionists in Israel felt betrayed by Begin, believing he was one of their own. In fact, upon Begin's return to Israel, some greeted him with a procession of black umbrellas, comparing the Camp David Accords to the 1938 Munich Agreement.¹⁷⁴ Rabbi

¹⁷⁰ Letter, Maranatha Baptist Church to Jimmy Carter, September 20, 1978, "9/20/78 [1]" folder, Box 102, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁷¹ As cited in Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), 208.

¹⁷² Memo, William Bowdler and Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, "Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments," September 25, 1978, NLC-17-143-5-18-1, RAC Project, JCL; Telegram, William Bowdler and Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, "Analysis of Arab-Israeli Developments No. 567," September 22, 1978, NLC-SAFE 17 B-13-72-4-7, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁷³ Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 149-150; Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2004), 167.

¹⁷⁴ Sprinzak, *The Ascendancy of Israel's Radical Right*, 76; Colin Shindler, *Ploughshares into Swords? Israelis and Jews in the Shadow of the Intifada* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 1991), 28.

Meir Kahane, who had rejoiced in Begin's election just one year ago, now denounced the prime minister, "The heart of the Begin tragedy is that a man who was a symbol, for half a century, of Jewish pride and strength, surrendered Jewish rights, sovereignty, and land out of a fear of the Gentile pressure. It is in a word, *Hillul Hashem*, the humiliation and desecration of the name of G-d by substituting fear of the finite Gentile for Jewish faith in the G-d of creation and history."¹⁷⁵

Despite the ambivalence and hostility of some, Carter sought to facilitate the conclusion of the formal Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty as rapidly as possible. The Camp David Accords provided the substantive framework for such a treaty, one that Carter believed could be negotiated within two weeks.¹⁷⁶ However, two major contentious issues remained: the linkage between the bilateral peace treaty and the Palestinian autonomy talks and the question of priority of obligations (e.g. did the Egyptian-Israeli treaty supersede Egypt's defensive agreements with other Arab countries?).¹⁷⁷

The talks between Begin and Sadat's subordinates bogged down quickly, necessitating Carter's continuing personal involvement. However, the Iranian Revolution changed the conditions of the negotiations because Iran was Israel's principal supplier of oil and many Israelis feared what would happen if Khomeini-like extremists overthrew Sadat. Moreover, Carter's looming reelection battle would limit the amount of personal attention he could devote to the talks.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁵ As cited in Sprinzak, *The Ascendance of Israel's Radical Right*, 82.

¹⁷⁶ Quandt, *Camp David*, 337-338.

¹⁷⁷ Quandt, *Peace Process*, 210.

¹⁷⁸ Strong, *Working in the World*, 190; Quandt, *Peace Process*, 222-223.

In February 1979, Carter met with Begin in Washington to convince the prime minister to move more quickly to conclude negotiations with Egypt. However, Brzezinski advised Carter, “Begin is in no rush. He believes that election year realities will increasingly weaken our hand in the negotiations.”¹⁷⁹ After another heated Begin-Carter meeting, the president decided to become more personally involved in moving the treaty negotiations forward through a “shuttle diplomacy” strategy between Egypt and Israel.¹⁸⁰ His advisors cautioned him about the consequences of failure, but ultimately Jordan conceded, “[Shuttle diplomacy] would be risky, but it seems no riskier than the notion several months ago of a Camp David summit.”¹⁸¹

On March 8, Carter flew to Cairo for his first round of negotiations with Sadat. For his part, Sadat accepted Carter’s role, telling the president, “Brother Jimmy, I will do whatever you think is best.”¹⁸² Before departing for Israel, Carter addressed the People’s Assembly and invoked words of peace from each of the three Abrahamic faiths:

We who are engaged in this great work, the work of peace, are of varied religious faiths. Some of us are Moslems; some are Jews; some are Christians. The forms of our faith are different. We worship the same God. And the message of Providence has always been the same. I would like to quote the words of the Holy Koran: "If thine adversary incline towards peace, do thou also incline towards peace and trust in God, for he is the one that heareth and knoweth all things." Now I would like to quote from the words of the Old Testament: "Depart from evil and do good; seek

¹⁷⁹ “Begin’s Strategy for Meetings with President Carter,” n.d., “Serial Xs—1/79/-2/79” folder, Box 36, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 279.

¹⁸⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, “Summary of the President’s Meeting with Prime Minister Begin,” March 2, 1979, “Serial Xs—3/79” folder, Box 36, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 243; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 280-281.

¹⁸¹ As cited in Strong, *Working in the World*, 192.

¹⁸² As cited in Bourne, *Jimmy Carter*, 438.

peace, and pursue it." And now I would like to quote from the words of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." My friends, my brothers, let us complete the work before us. Let us find peace together.¹⁸³

The American Embassy in Cairo later reported that Carter's invocation of faith produced an "emotional response" that was "palpable" among Egyptians.¹⁸⁴

Upon arriving in Tel Aviv, Carter reminded his Israeli audience in the welcoming ceremony, "The task we are striving to accomplish together demands more than reason, more, even, than will. It demands faith. For in a very real sense, the task of building peace is a sacred task. In the words of the Midrash, 'Peace is important, for God's name is Shalom.' Let us have shalom. Let us make peace together."¹⁸⁵ That evening, Carter met with Begin to cover all the progress made with Sadat, but the prime minister's unwillingness to compromise on some issues infuriated the normally mild-mannered president.¹⁸⁶ The next day, Carter visited Yad Vashem with Begin and empathized more with the prime minister's intransigence: "Moving slowly through this shrine, I was filled with extraordinary emotion. It was much easier for me to understand Begin's extreme caution concerning the security of Israel. The historic persecution of the Jewish people had always been known to me—but now it was a more vivid reality."¹⁸⁷

¹⁸³ Jimmy Carter, "Cairo, Egypt Address Before the People's Assembly," March 10, 1979, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32032>.

¹⁸⁴ Telegram, American Embassy in Cairo to Cyrus Vance, n.d., "President's Trip to the Mideast 3/7/79-3/14/79" folder, Box 122, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁸⁵ Jimmy Carter, "Tel Aviv, Israel Remarks of President Yitzhak Navon and President Carter at the Welcoming Ceremony," March 10, 1979, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32034>.

¹⁸⁶ Carter, *White House Diary*, 301.

¹⁸⁷ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 421-422.

Following his visit to the Israeli Holocaust memorial, Carter attended a Baptist worship service, although he was preoccupied with his meeting with the Israeli cabinet later that day and his speech before the Knesset the next day.¹⁸⁸ Jordan and Carter's other advisors reminded him that despite his frustration with Begin, he should remain calm because he had the opportunity to present the case for peace to the cabinet, the Knesset, and the Israeli people at large, thus putting more pressure on the prime minister to be flexible.¹⁸⁹

On March 12, Carter spoke to the Knesset, making numerous allusions to Old Testament metaphors like "pounding Middle East swords into plowshares" and using the traditional Christian aphorism, "we must pray as if everything depended on God, and we must act as if everything depends on ourselves" to convince the Israeli legislators of the urgency of finalizing this treaty.¹⁹⁰

While some parliamentary debate followed, the Carters found time to spend with the Jewish archaeologist Yigael Yadin to learn more about the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Israeli cabinet also met to further discuss how to reach a mutually acceptable compromise with Egypt.¹⁹¹ The next morning, Carter met with Begin again and agreed to an American guarantee of Israeli oil supplies in case of an interruption and a deletion of the treaty language permitting free Egyptian access to the Gaza District. Begin found these

¹⁸⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 421-422.

¹⁸⁹ Carter, *White House Diary*, 301.

¹⁹⁰ Jimmy Carter, "Jerusalem, Israel Address Before the Knesset," March 12, 1979, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32038>.

¹⁹¹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 423.

proposals acceptable and Carter prepared to travel back to Cairo to inform Sadat of his success.¹⁹²

Upon his arrival in Egypt, Carter informed Sadat, “You will be pleased.” He responded, “My people in Egypt are furious at how the Israelis have treated our friend Jimmy Carter.” Carter laughed, “It wasn’t bad.”¹⁹³ However, Egyptian Foreign Minister Mustafa Khalil opposed the details of the treaty and wanted some additional revisions. An exasperated Carter responded, “For the last 18 months, I, the president of the most powerful nation on earth, have acted the postman. I am not a proud man—I have done the best I could—but I cannot go back to try to change the language.”¹⁹⁴ Due to their close friendship, Sadat accepted the treaty draft, so Carter had finally succeeded in brokering an Egyptian-Israeli peace treaty. When he called to inform American political leaders of the trip’s outcome, Democratic Speaker of the House Tip O’Neill declared, “Mr. President, you’re not just a deacon anymore, but a pope!”¹⁹⁵

Two weeks later, Begin and Sadat met in Washington to formally sign the treaty in the presence of Carter, the leader who had devoted so much time, energy, and political capital to the peace process. In his speech at the signing ceremony, Carter again invoked the words of peace from Islam and Judaism to put their work on a spiritual plane:

All our religious doctrines give us hope. In the Koran, we read: "But if the enemy incline towards peace, do thou also incline towards peace, and trust in God; for He is the One that heareth and knoweth all things." And the prophet Isaiah said: "Nations shall belt their swords into plowshares and

¹⁹² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 424-425.

¹⁹³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 425.

¹⁹⁴ As cited in Strong, *Working in the World*, 200.

¹⁹⁵ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 426.

their spears into pruning hooks: nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." So let us now lay aside war. Let us now reward all the children of Abraham who hunger for a comprehensive peace in the Middle East. Let us now enjoy the adventure of becoming fully human, fully neighbors, even brothers and sisters. We pray God, we pray God together, that these dreams will come true. I believe they will.¹⁹⁶

Later at the evening banquet to celebrate the treaty's signing, Carter opened the meal with a prayer, a decision he thought was "acceptable" because of the "religious overtones of the event."¹⁹⁷ Initially, the White House had planned an interfaith praise service for Carter, Begin, and Sadat to attend at the National Cathedral as part of the treaty signing ceremony, but later cancelled the event at the cathedral because it "would be inappropriate for non-Christians in such a sensitive political situation." Instead, an interfaith organization took over and hosted the event at the Lincoln Memorial.¹⁹⁸

Even prior to the signing ceremony, Brzezinski urged the president to step back from the West Bank autonomy talks the next phase of the process outlined in the Camp David Accords. He wanted Carter to focus on other pressing foreign policy issues and his reelection campaign.¹⁹⁹ Satisfied with the achievement of an Egyptian-Israeli treaty and determined to focus on the autonomy talks in a second term, Carter appointed US Trade Representative Robert Strauss as his special envoy to the Middle East to oversee the

¹⁹⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Remarks of President Carter, President Anwar al-Sadat of Egypt, and Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel at the Egyptian-Israeli Peace Treaty Signing Ceremony," March 26, 1979, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32103>.

¹⁹⁷ Carter, *White House Diary*, 308.

¹⁹⁸ Marjorie Hyer, "Interfaith Religious Service Praises Peace Treaty," *Washington Post*, March 27, 1979.

¹⁹⁹ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "NSC Weekly Report #91," March 23, 1979, "Weekly Reports [to the President], 91-101: [3/79-6/79]" folder, Box 42, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

talks. When Carter asked Strauss to fill this role, he said, “I’ve never even read the Bible, and I’m a Jew,” concerned that he would not understand the president’s religious convictions about achieving peace in the Holy Land. Carter kindly responded that it was never too late to start reading the Bible and reminded him that Henry Kissinger had overseen the disengagement agreements after the 1973 October War.²⁰⁰

For the rest of his term, Carter never involved himself in the peace process at the same level because he had to deal with the Iranian hostage crisis, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and the fight for a second term. However, he noted on several occasions how the Camp David Accords functioned as a “bible” or “sacred document” in guiding the ongoing autonomy talks.²⁰¹ In October 1979, Carter even urged Pope John Paul II to visit Jerusalem and lend some of his moral authority to the peace process, so the American president would not be the only outsider working for a comprehensive peace.²⁰² That same month, Strauss resigned his post as envoy to return to the United States to run Carter’s campaign, so the president selected Sol Linowitz, the lawyer who oversaw the Panama Canal treaty negotiations, to replace Strauss.²⁰³

Unfortunately, the autonomy talks progressed little, but laid the groundwork for future negotiations that resulted in the Oslo Accords of 1994. Quandt summed up the reason for the failure, “However talented his special negotiators might have been, they

²⁰⁰ Carter, *White House Diary*, 311.

²⁰¹ Memorandum of Conversation, “Meeting to Commemorate First Anniversary of the Signing of the Camp David Accords,” September 17, 1979, “Serial Xs—5/79-9/79” folder, Box 36, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; Carter, *White House Diary*, 417-418.

²⁰² Carter, *White House Diary*, 360.

²⁰³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 492-493.

had little chance of succeeding once Carter no longer seemed to be personally involved in the negotiations.”²⁰⁴ Moreover, Yosef Burg, leader of the National Religious Party, led the Israeli negotiating team after Dayan’s resignation in October 1979 and opposed Israel losing control over the West Bank and Gaza.²⁰⁵ The crises in Iran and Afghanistan also confirmed the oft-repeated Israeli argument that the Palestinian issue did not drive all the problems of the region and reinforced Israeli leaders’ security fears of instability in the Islamic world.²⁰⁶

Even as he prepared to leave office, Carter remained committed to the unfinished work of Camp David. A few days before Ronald Reagan’s inauguration, Carter told Israeli Ambassador Ephraim Evron he would be active in the region as a former president “to pursue my concept of what Israel ought to be.” Foreshadowing future controversies, he told Evron, “I don’t see how they can continue as an occupying power depriving the Palestinians of basic human rights, and I don’t see how they can absorb 3 million more Arabs into Israel without letting the Jews become a minority in their own country.”²⁰⁷

In his memoirs, Carter admitted that he spent more time on the Middle East peace process than any other issue in his presidency and described his hopes that other Arab leaders would follow Sadat’s courageous example and make peace with Israel.²⁰⁸ As a

²⁰⁴ Quandt, *Camp David*, 322.

²⁰⁵ Colin Shindler, *The Land Beyond Promise: Israel, Likud, and the Zionist Dream*, revised edition (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co, 2002), 99.

²⁰⁶ CIA Memorandum “Impact on Israeli Policy of Events in Iran and Afghanistan,” January 14, 1980, NLC-25-50-8-2-9, RAC Project, JCL.

²⁰⁷ Carter, *White House Diary*, 508.

²⁰⁸ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 429. Gaddis Smith also notes that the Middle East also made up over thirty percent of Carter’s presidential memoirs. Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 169.

deeply committed evangelical Christian, Carter felt a great affinity for Israel and wanted to secure the future of the Holy Land because his mind always thought of the Bible when he discussed issues surrounding Israel. To achieve his goal of peace for Israel and its neighbors, he frequently alluded to biblical symbols and themes in his public addresses and private conversations, especially with other fervently religious leaders, such as Begin and Sadat. Sometimes these spiritual appeals worked, other times, especially with Begin, they complicated a situation that was already tremendously complex due to the competing religious claims of Jew, Christian, and Muslim to the same lands. Looking back on Camp David, Carter told an interviewer how much religion played a role in the success of the Egyptian-Israeli agreement:

Even if the religious factor was a minimal element, the Camp David agreement hung by such a narrow thread that I think any particular factor could have caused failure, so because of that explanation, I don't think there's any chance, in retrospect, that we could have been successful without a common faith in a monotheistic God, whom we all recognized to be the same, among me and Begin and Sadat...So to summarize...I would say that any substantial factor could have caused failure, and religion—a common faith—was a substantial factor.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹ As cited in Richard G. Hitchens Jr., *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 128.

Chapter 4

"THOSE WHO ARE SLOW TO ANGER CALM CONTENTION": JIMMY CARTER AND THE EMERGENCE OF KHOMEINI'S IRAN

It is one of the great ironies of history that it should have been the administration of Jimmy Carter that was called upon to deal with the exotic extremes of the ayatollah's regime in Iran. No writer of fiction could ever have conjured up a set of circumstances so ripe with contrasts and opportunities for mutual incomprehension. Each of these two national leaders embodied an aspect of his own national culture to a degree of perfection that lent itself naturally to exaggeration and caricature.¹

-Gary Sick, NSC Iran expert

Gary Sick's retrospective comments illustrate the considerable difficulties the Carter administration faced in dealing with the revolutionary leadership of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in Iran. While Jimmy Carter won by running on his character and highlighting his Southern Baptist faith, Khomeini, a highly-regarded cleric in Shia Muslim circles, became the symbol that united disparate elements of the Iranian opposition to successfully overthrow the shah. Later, Khomeini gradually eliminated his opposition partners and guided the Iranian revolution down a radically religious nationalist path that secular liberal and Communist Iranian leaders never expected.²

During the revolution to overthrow the shah, the ensuing transitional period, and the hostage crisis, President Carter and his advisors at times seemed ill-informed about

¹ Gary Sick, *All Fall Down: America's Tragic Encounter with Iran* (New York: Random House, 1985), 257.

² See Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution: Iran and the World in the Age of Ayatollahs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009); Con Coughlin, *Khomeini's Ghost: The Iranian Revolution and the Rise of Militant Islam* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2009); Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State: Khomeini and the Making of a New Iran* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010); and Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival: How Conflicts within Islam will Shape the Future* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2007) for more information about Khomeini's unique blending of religious and political ideology. See Sandra Mackey, *The Iranians: Persia, Islam, and the Soul of a Nation* (New York: Plume, 1998) for a general history of Iran focused on the tension between the Persian and Islamic identities of Iran.

the appeal of Khomeini's religious nationalism and other times underestimated Khomeini's power and decision making. While some hoped that Carter's religious convictions would help deal with the new Islamic Republic of Iran, they frequently hindered US-Iranian relations.³

The Carter administration faced its first crisis with Khomeini in the waning months of 1978, as the shah lost power and finally collapsed in January 1979. Diplomatic historian Gaddis Smith notes that "the Carter Administration was very slow to realize the seriousness of the situation. It was hampered by a lack of understanding of Iranian history and society, and especially of the political character of the Islamic clergy. It acted in a confused way in the face of a very confusing situation."⁴

One can attribute the delayed reaction of the administration to the worsened political conditions in Iran and the flurry of other foreign policy initiatives pursued at the time, including the Camp David accords, the SALT II negotiations, and the normalization of US-Chinese relations. National security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski recalled, "Our decision-making circuits were heavily overloaded."⁵ Even if senior administration officials had focused their undivided attention on Iran during the revolution, they rarely questioned US support for the shah, making it impossible to find a moderate alternative

³ See James F. Goode, *The United States and Iran: In the Shadow of Mussaddiq* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Mary Ann Heiss, *Empire and Nationhood: The United States, Great Britain, and Iranian Oil, 1950-1954* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997); Stephen Kinzer, *All the Shah's Men: An American Coup and the Roots of Middle East Terror* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2003); James Goode, "Reforming Iran during the Kennedy Years," *Diplomatic History* 15:1 (January 1991): 13-29; and Roham Alvandi, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the Shah: The Origins of Iranian Primacy in the Persian Gulf," *Diplomatic History* 36:2 (April 2012): 337-372 for the historical context of US-Iranian relations.

⁴ Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, & Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 187.

⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1983), 358.

to him or Khomeini. Thus, Nikki Keddie, a historian of modern Iran, concludes, “Probably only a very different set of policies over the previous twenty-seven years could have led to different results.”⁶

Just as Carter’s human rights rhetoric raised hopes in the US after eight years of the Nixon-Kissinger *realpolitik* foreign policy, Carter’s faith as well as his emphasis about human rights also created new expectations among Iranians who opposed the shah’s authoritarianism. One of Khomeini’s allies, Ayatollah Hussein Montzeri, pointed to Carter’s Christian faith as reason to believe US-Iranian relations were changing, “We didn’t expect Carter to defend the shah for he is a religious man who has raised the slogan of defending human rights. How can Carter, the devout Christian, defend the Shah?”⁷ He also recalled, “At the time we were in jail, prisoners would say that dear Jimmy will arrive and solve our problems and we will be set free.”⁸ Part of the later Iranian demonization of Carter arose from the president’s failure to meet the lofty expectations of Iranian dissidents in how the US government would put an end to the shah’s repressive practices.

Despite warnings about the religiously inspired uprisings against the shah that began in 1978, the Carter administration’s intelligence on Khomeini and his politics was limited. US intelligence only understood Khomeini’s politics through the lens of traditional Shia clergy rather than taking into account the revolutionary implications from

⁶ Nikki Keddie, *Modern Iran: Roots and Results of Revolution*, updated edition (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 236.

⁷ As cited in Barry Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions: The American Experience and Iran* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980), 195.

⁸ As cited in Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution*, 37.

his writings about the *velayat-e faqih* (guardianship of the jurist). One NSC report noted that Khomeini “presented no specific program but is rich in pious generalities.”⁹ A CIA report issued a couple weeks later claimed “Khomeini’s ambiguity reflects a lack of interest in a specific political program. For him Shia Islam is a total social/political/economic system that needs no further explanation.”¹⁰

Even the ayatollah’s closest confidants did not fully appreciate Khomeini’s plans to establish an Islamic Republic. Future Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh believed Khomeini’s pamphlet *Islamic Government* “sounded like a Muslim *Mein Kampf*,” but he declared “that touch of native fascism could be smoothed out.”¹¹ Ghotbzadeh and future Prime Minister Abolhasan Bani Sadr promoted Khomeini as the “Gandhi of Islam” who would renounce his political ideas to account for the political realities of governance.¹² Bani Sadr later recounted that during Khomeini’s brief exile in Paris before returning to Iran, “[Khomeini] was scripted. Just like Ronald Reagan. We told him what to say and he memorized it and recited it verbatim.”¹³

Optimistic predictions that the shah would remain in power well into the 1980s faded quickly. President Carter wrote on November 2, 1978, “The shah expressed deep concern about whether to set up an interim government, a military government, or

⁹ “The Opposition to the Shah,” November 3, 1978, “Iran 11/78” folder, Box 29, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

¹⁰ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “The Politics of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini,” November 20, 1978, NLC-25-28-8-8-8, RAC Project, JCL.

¹¹ David Harris, *The Crisis: The President, the Prophet, and the Shah—1979 and the Coming of Militant Islam* (New York: Little, Brown, and Company, 2004), 79-80.

¹² Harris, *The Crisis*, 127; Keddie, *Modern Iran*, 240.

¹³ As cited in Harris, *The Crisis*, 108.

perhaps even to abdicate.”¹⁴ Contrary to his earlier report that “our destiny is to work with the shah,” Ambassador William Sullivan cabled Washington on November 9 with a message entitled “Thinking the Unthinkable,” which concluded that the shah would fall and that the Carter administration needed to begin considering the range of possible future governments in Iran.¹⁵

While Carter and his team discussed a variety of options for how to proceed in Iran, the shah felt that he was receiving “confusing and contradictory” messages from the State Department and the National Security Council about whether to continue with liberalization programs or to reestablish law and order by the use of force. These contradictory messages encouraged the shah’s paranoid conspiracy theories as he later claimed “the Americans wanted me out” to replace him with “an Islamic Republic as a bulwark against communist incursions.”¹⁶

Carter’s December 7 response to a reporter’s question about the shah’s survival, “I don’t know. I hope so,” reflected a vacillating US attitude.¹⁷ Iranians perceived the statement as the president publicly announcing the end of US support for the shah’s regime even though in reality Carter and his advisors preferred that the shah remain in

¹⁴ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 2010), 257.

¹⁵ Burton Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.*, revised edition (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 157; Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 170.

¹⁶ Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, *Answer to History* (New York: Stein and Day, 1980), 164-165.

¹⁷ Jimmy Carter, “Interview with the President Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Breakfast with Members of the White House Correspondents Association,” December 7, 1978, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=30273>.

power in some capacity.¹⁸ Iranian scholar Amir Taheri explains the reception as part of the larger Iranian belief at the time that the US was a *deus ex machina* in their affairs: “Every word uttered by US diplomats was seized upon as a signal from Washington and wildly interpreted far beyond its original context.”¹⁹ Mehdi Bazargan, the first prime minister of the Islamic Republic, later told Charles Naas, deputy director of the US embassy, “You have no idea how encouraged we were by President Carter.”²⁰

The Carter administration began seeking moderate alternatives to the shah and Khomeini as early as November 1978. Options discussed included a regency council, a military government, and even a way to welcome Khomeini back to Iran with the shah as a constitutional monarch. Defense Secretary Harold Brown agreed with Brzezinski’s preference for a military government, making the case, “The military might in fact be bad in the long run; but, we are certain that Khomeini would be bad in the short run.”²¹ After the shah departed Tehran on January 16, 1979 for a “vacation” from which he never returned, Carter called on Khomeini and his “deep religious convictions” to support stability and prevent bloodshed in Iran.²²

¹⁸ Harris, *The Crisis*, 121.

¹⁹ Amir Taheri, *Nest of Spies: America’s Journey to Disaster in Iran* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), 95.

²⁰ As cited in Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil’s Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 228.

²¹ Minutes of Special Coordination Committee Meeting, “Iran,” November 2, 1978, NLC-SAFE 39 D-38-99-1-8, RAC Project, JCL; Minutes of Special Coordination Committee Meeting, “Iran,” December 13, 1978, “Meetings—SCC 123: 12/13/78” folder, Box 29, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

²² Jimmy Carter, “The President’s News Conference,” January 17, 1979, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32324>.

In January 1979, as a last ditch effort to prop up the recently installed government of Prime Minister Shapour Bakhtiar, an appointee of the shah, and prevent the return of Khomeini, the Carter administration dispatched General Robert Huyser to consult with the Iranian military in the event the Bakhtiar government collapsed and the military needed to step in and govern. Huyser simply knew little about Iran and the Iranian generals kept him in the more secure, shah-friendly areas of Tehran, so he never quite understood the larger revolutionary picture.²³ Furthermore, he firmly believed that the arrival of Khomeini signaled the beginning of Iran's transition to communism as he could not comprehend that Khomeini and the other religious leaders could lead a successful political revolution or establish a religious state in an increasingly secular world. He later wrote in 1986, "There were so many clever moves on Khomeini's side that I continually wondered who was doing their planning for them, and I would still like to know the answer."²⁴

The unsuccessful efforts to support a moderate Iranian government to replace the shah demonstrated how badly the US intelligence community had failed in its operations in Iran. As early as November 6, 1978, Sick wrote Brzezinski complaining about the lack of adequate information about the Iranian opposition, calling the situation "an intelligence disaster of the first order."²⁵ CIA Director Stansfield Turner further noted

²³ James Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion: The Tragedy of American-Iranian Relations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 254-255.

²⁴ Carter, *White House Diary*, 288; Robert Huyser, *Mission to Tehran: The fall of the Shah and the rise of Khomeini—recounted by the US general who was secretly sent at the last minute to prevent it* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1986), 184.

²⁵ Memo, Gary Sick to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Talking Paper for PRC on Iran, November 6, 1978," November 6, 1978, "Meetings—PRC 75: 11/6/78" folder, Box 25, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 104.

that practically none of the evidence of the revolution required secret information or espionage missions because “just plain scholarly research on Iran from about 1970 onward should have forecast the problems the Shah would encounter.”²⁶ With the insights offered by hindsight, Brzezinski waxed eloquent about the administration’s failure to understand the phenomenon of religious nationalism sweeping Iran:

But a deeper intellectual misjudgment of a central historical reality was involved here: that rapid modernization of a very traditional society breeds its own instabilities and revolutionary dynamics, that it requires a political system that can gradually enlarge political participation while providing safety valves for social dissatisfaction, that old religious beliefs should not be uprooted without gradual public acceptance of more modern values, including some genuine connection with the national past.²⁷

One of the most fundamental factors contributing to the US intelligence failure in the fall of the shah and the rise of Khomeini remained a general underestimation of the power of religion in politics. During one Iran policy meeting, a CIA operative exclaimed, “Who ever took religion seriously anyway!”²⁸ It seemed surprising that the evangelical Carter would underestimate the power of faith, but much of the surrounding secular culture believed religion was best left in the private sphere other than the occasional civil religion references. Even Carter’s chief campaign advisor Hamilton Jordan dubbed his boss’s public confessions of his born-again faith the “weirdo factor” in the 1976 election.²⁹

²⁶ Stansfield Turner, *Secrecy and Democracy: The CIA in Transition* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 117.

²⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 397.

²⁸ As cited in Rubin, *Paved with Good Intentions*, 215.

²⁹ Edward Berkowitz, *Something Happened: A Political and Cultural Overview of the Seventies* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 108.

However, the president's faith included a strong commitment to the traditional Baptist doctrine of the separation of church and state, a conviction not shared by Khomeini.³⁰ Carter did not understand that Khomeini was the latest figure in the long history of mixing of religion and politics in Islam. The notion of separating church and state was largely foreign to Islam. As John Esposito, an expert on Islam, explained, "From its beginnings, Islam existed and spread as a community-state; it was both a faith and a political order."³¹

Dismissals of the power of Khomeini's religious appeal to ordinary Iranians included policymakers at all levels of the administration and even Carter himself. Professor James Bill explained how Carter administration policymakers routinely described Iranian actions as "irrational, fanatical, unpredictable, aberrant, or 'oriental' behavior."³² For example, Carter read a translated interview with Khomeini and sent the article back to Brzezinski with the word "Nutty" scrawled across the top.³³ Officials in Washington and Tehran refused to believe religious leaders with what they described as a "medieval" mindset could topple the mighty shah.³⁴

³⁰ See E. Brooks Holifield, "Three Strands of Jimmy Carter's Religion," *New Republic*, (June 5, 1976), 15-17.

³¹ John L. Esposito, *Islam: The Straight Path*, revised third edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 32. Chapter five addresses the contemporary blending of religion and politics in Islam.

³² Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 10.

³³ David Farber, *Taken Hostage: The Iran Hostage Crisis and America's First Encounter with Radical Islam* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 101.

³⁴ William J. Daugherty, *In the Shadow of the Ayatollah: A CIA Hostage in Iran* (Annapolis: US Naval Institute Press, 2001), 75; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 67.

Furthermore, these same officials had a tendency to see the Kremlin behind the scenes of the revolution rather than appreciating the power of Khomeini's indigenous Shia movement. One NSC official remarked, "The Soviets are there but they know how to cover their tracks. By the time you get proof, the Russians will be in control of Tehran."³⁵

As the prospects for a Khomeini-led government seemed more inevitable, the Carter administration considered exactly what an Islamic Republic might look like since no models existed. Most policymakers accepted the assessments of secular Iranian revolutionaries like Bani-Sadr and Ghotbzadeh that Khomeini would only serve as a spiritual guide of the Islamic Republic rather than a driving force in governance. Brzezinski informed Carter a general consensus existed in the Special Coordination Committee that "Khomeini will revert to his role as venerable sage, establishing the general parameters of political action but not involving himself in the details."³⁶ Precht believed Khomeini's revolution would only try "to bring Islam into line with new realities," such as the land reform of the shah's White Revolution.³⁷ Andrew Young, UN ambassador, encouraged Carter, noting "Khomeini will be some kind of a saint when we finally get over the panic of what is happening there."³⁸

³⁵ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 123-124.

³⁶ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "NSC Weekly Report #84," January 12, 1979, "Weekly Reports, 82-90: [12/78-3/79]" folder, Box 42, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

³⁷ Memo, Gary Sick to David Aaron, "Detailed Minutes for Mini-SCCs of January 11, 15, and 18, 1979," January 24, 1979, NLC-15-20-6-14-2, RAC Project, JCL.

³⁸ Memo, Andrew Young to Jimmy Carter, "Weekly Report from Ambassador Young," February 9, 1979, NLC-126-16-20-1-1, RAC Project, JCL.

After the intelligence failures surrounding the fall of the shah, the State Department paid more attention to the analysis of academic Iran experts, many of whom had forecasted the shah's overthrow. Bill represented the widely held view among academics that Khomeini would only serve as a spiritual guide because no Islamic cleric had ever governed Iran since Shia Islam became Iran's official state religion in 1501.³⁹ Bill chided US policymakers for not accepting the success of the revolution and failing to understand Khomeini.⁴⁰ Princeton University Professor Richard Falk concluded after visiting the country that "Iran may yet provide us with a desperately-needed model of humane government for a third-world country."⁴¹

During the final days of 1978, even before the shah left Iran, Carter knew that his senior foreign policy advisors, a collection of mainline Protestants, Catholics, and Jews, simply lacked an understanding of Khomeini's Islamic revolutionary movement or the larger global resurgence of religion. At one meeting during Iran's revolutionary crisis, Vice-President Walter Mondale, a Presbyterian, asked Director Turner, a Christian Scientist, "What the hell is an 'Ayatollah' anyway?" Turner responded, "I'm not sure I know."⁴² General Huyser recalled not even hearing of Khomeini until April 1978 during an arms sale-related mission. At that time, he viewed Khomeini's opposition to the shah

³⁹ Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 279-280.

⁴⁰ Memo, David Newsom to Cyrus Vance, "Situation in Iran," February 2, 1979, "Iran—Meetings 2/1/79-2/17/79" folder, Box 12, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

⁴¹ As cited in Sick, *All Fall Down*, 195. Sick recalls that, "Three years later, appearing on a panel with Professor Falk, I was startled to hear him describe the Khomeini regime as 'the most terroristic since Hitler.'"

⁴² As cited in Peter Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Postpresidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 454.

as nothing but a Persian “blood feud,” resulting from the deaths of Khomeini’s father and son.⁴³ Carter’s principal representative to the shah, Ambassador Sullivan, admitted “I had never lived in the Islamic world and knew little about its culture or its ethos.”⁴⁴

To remedy this deficiency, Carter ordered the NSC, the State Department, and the CIA to study the resurgence of political Islam. Carter wanted each to not only utilize his own regional experts, but also to consult with outside academics to discuss issues ranging from the national and transnational roots of the Islamic resurgence phenomenon to the link between this religious revival and socioeconomic modernization.⁴⁵ To this point, Carter and his team had focused much of their attention on trying to maintain the shah’s regime or a US-friendly transitional regime, but his decision to commission this governmental study of political Islam coincided with the realization that Khomeini’s revolution likely would be successful. Moreover, Carter recognized that very few of his senior advisors knew enough about the Islamic roots of this political movement and what it might mean for US-Iranian relations. One Islamic scholar cleverly described the large-scale government study as addressing the fundamental question, “How does a born-again Christian deal with a born-again Moslem?”⁴⁶

Many of the subsequent reports discussed Islam as a “political religion” with no clear division between the sacred and secular. The reports also noted the significant

⁴³ Robert Huyser, *Mission to Tehran*, 9-10.

⁴⁴ William Sullivan, *Mission to Iran* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1981), 12-13, 16.

⁴⁵ Carter, *White House Diary*, 268; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Cyrus Vance and Stansfield Turner, “Islamic Resurgence,” December 20, 1978, NLC-15-20-5-16-1, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Gary Sick to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Islamic Resurgence,” December 19, 1978, NLC-15-20-5-16-1, RAC Project, JCL.

⁴⁶ Oswald Johnston, “US Strains to Adjust to Iran’s Islamic Shift,” *Los Angeles Times*, January 31, 1979.

differences between Sunni and Shia Islam such as the tendency of Sunnis to more willingly to accept the flaws of temporal governments. The government experts and scholars, including a handful of Muslim academics, also anticipated future academic discussions of religious nationalism as they explored how the failures of modernization contributed to the resurgence of religious fervor. The specialists also noted how Islamic fundamentalism had an anticolonial history that had transitioned into ire toward indigenous secular nationalist regimes such as the shah in Iran or Nasser in Egypt that had tried and failed at Western-style modernization.⁴⁷

One of the central questions the study of resurgent Islam addressed was “can it happen elsewhere?” Certainly, Khomeini had grander ambitions extending beyond Iran because he wanted to establish a “papacy” among Shia Muslims and possibly be the leader of the entire Muslim world. However, the national boundaries dividing Shia Muslims and the theological differences between Sunni and Shia Muslims proved too large to bridge for Khomeini to exert greater leadership.⁴⁸ American policymakers worried about the potentially destabilizing effect of the Islamic Revolution on Turkey, Egypt, and Saudi Arabia, all pro-US allies. Ultimately, they concluded their allies were safe from the “Iranian sickness” partly because of the differences between Sunni and Shia

⁴⁷ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #87,” February 2, 1979, “Weekly Reports, 82-90: [12/78-3/79]” folder, Box 42, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; “The Politics of Islamic Revival,” n.d., NLC-25-47-7-4-2, RAC Project, JCL; “The New Islamic Fundamentalism,” n.d., NLC-25-47-7-3-3, RAC Project, JCL; Intelligence Assessment, “The Resurgence of Islam,” March 1979, “Middle East: Brzezinski Trip, 3/79” folder, Box 52, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

⁴⁸ Vali Nasr, *The Shia Revival*, 136-137; David Lesch, 1979: *The Year That Shaped the Modern Middle East* (Cambridge: Westview Press, 2001), 59; Peter Demant, *Islam vs. Islamism: The Dilemma of the Muslim World* (Westport: Praeger, 2006), 120; Vanessa Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*, 192.

Islam. Sunni Muslims typically regarded temporal government as the leading force of the *umma* (community of the faithful), while the clergy led the *umma* in the Shia tradition.⁴⁹

Ultimately, all the major components of the US foreign policy bureaucracy believed that Iran's Islamic Revolution was a local phenomenon with limited regional implications. Brzezinski cautioned the president, "we should be careful not to overgeneralize from the Iranian case. Islamic revivalist movements are not sweeping the Middle East and are not likely to be the wave of the future."⁵⁰ A National Security Council colleague wrote, "We are unlikely to see a series of Iran-like upheavals in the rest of the Middle East, but we are fated to deal with a large number of Islamic countries whose populations are proud of their cultures, fearful of some of the consequences of modernization, and aware of their vulnerability and weakness."⁵¹

Others in different parts of the bureaucracy agreed. State Department experts at the Bureau of Intelligence and Research believed that "Pan-Islam is not likely to become a significant international force. There are too many regional and cultural divisions

⁴⁹ Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Is Turkey Susceptible to the Iranian Sickness?" December 15, 1978, NLC-25-95-14-1-4, RAC Project, JCL; Telegram, American Embassy in Jidda to Cyrus Vance, "Iran: Can it happen here?" January 14, 1979, NLC-15-46-4-20-9, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Peter Tarnoff to Walter Mondale, Harold Brown, Zbigniew Brzezinski, David Jones, and Stansfield Turner, "SCC Meeting on Iran," February 20, 1979, NLC-24-102-3-3-6, RAC Project, JCL; Fawaz Gerges believes that the Sunni-Shia analysis can be superficial and points to the universal message of a more general political Islam. Fawaz Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 67n33.

⁵⁰ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "NSC Weekly Report #87," February 2, 1979, "Weekly Reports, 82-90: [12/78-3/79]" folder, Box 42, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

⁵¹ "The Politics of Islamic Revival," n.d., NLC-25-47-7-4-2, RAC Project, JCL.

within the Muslim world for united political action.”⁵² CIA analysts dismissed the idea of a transnational Islamism, explaining “Iran aside, the politics of Islamic states remains focused on local concerns, and various Islamic groups so far show no signs of developing a leadership or a philosophy that crosses national boundaries” and concluding that “national interest overrides transnational values.”⁵³

Other than the effect of the Iranian Revolution on other Muslim countries, American policymakers also studied how Islamic religious nationalism would affect the US-USSR competition. The notion that the United States and Iran shared a common interest based on faith against the atheistic Soviet Union developed out of this study of the Islamic resurgence. In particular, Brzezinski, an ardent anti-Soviet hawk, sought to find ways to make religious appeals to the Islamic Republic of Iran to combat communism. Carter enunciated similar ideas about the common foe of communism later in his public rhetoric after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. One paper even sought to find common ground among the three Abrahamic faiths of Christianity, Islam, and Judaism in the problems they faced such as communism while downplaying their theological differences.⁵⁴

To implement this concept, the Voice of America broadcasts began to emphasize the common spiritual heritage shared by the United States and Iran as a way to prevent

⁵² Memo, William Quandt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Studies of Islamic Fundamentalism,” February 13, 1979, NLC-25-47-7-3-3, RAC Project, JCL; “The New Islamic Fundamentalism,” n.d., NLC-25-47-7-3-3, RAC Project, JCL.

⁵³ Intelligence Assessment, “The Resurgence of Islam,” March 1979, “Middle East: Brzezinski Trip, 3/79” folder, Box 52, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

⁵⁴ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to William Quandt, “Islamic Revival,” January 2, 1979, NLC-15-20-6-2-5, RAC Project, JCL; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 470; “Islam: An Appreciation,” n.d., NLC-25-47-7-3-3, RAC Project, JCL.

Tehran from aligning with the Soviet Union. VOA began expanding its Persian-language broadcasts to reach more Iranians in their native language. These new broadcasts included content on the importance of religion in American life and profiles of prominent Muslim Americans. Meanwhile, the International Communication Agency developed new exchange programs between the United States and Islamic countries to cultivate this idea of a shared religious background.⁵⁵

However, the Iranians resisted American propaganda messages. Although the new government opposed communism, it also sought to be nonaligned. As new Foreign Minister Ibrahim Yazdi pointed out to the Americans, Iran had “no better memories” of Russia than the United States and that “at least Americans believe in God.”⁵⁶

Despite all the information gathered during this study of resurgent Islam, the Carter administration still found it difficult to apply all this new data in dealing with the new Iranian government. Khomeini continued to cultivate an anti-Western sentiment in Iran with statements such as, “I beg you to be on your guard, these Westernized [Iranians] want to take away our Islam.”⁵⁷ One Iranian scholar who spent significant time with Khomeini advised the Carter administration that Khomeini “knows almost nothing

⁵⁵ Memo, Peter Tarnoff to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Strengthening the American Image and Countering Soviet Propaganda in Iran,” February 13, 1979, NLC-25-96-20-1-6, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Peter Tarnoff to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “US Posture Toward Islam,” February 12, 1979, NLC-25-47-7-3-3, RAC Project, JCL.

⁵⁶ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2004), 122; Yazdi as cited in Sick, *All Fall Down*, 168-169.

⁵⁷ “Imam lashes at ‘the Westernized,’” *Tehran Times*, June 18, 1979.

of the non-Islamic world. He does not understand the West, and in his fear of the unknown he hates it.”⁵⁸

As the chaos surrounding the revolution continued to unfold and purges occurred across Iranian society, the American diplomats in Tehran wondered how to maintain routine diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran. Bruce Laingen, the *charge d'affaires* in Tehran, noted the new government was “adrift” and seeking to make the United States the “convenient scapegoat” for the lack of social progress following the fall of the shah.⁵⁹ Ken Taylor, the Canadian ambassador in Tehran, attributed part of the chaotic conditions to the fact that “Ayatollah Khomeini and his supporters were astounded by the rapid and total collapse of the shah and his army. They had anticipated years of struggle and counted on more time to introduce and form a government in exile during a lengthy transitional period.”⁶⁰

Since the political scene in Iran was in flux, the Carter administration mistakenly built relationships only with the secular leadership represented by Bazargan and Yazdi. The earlier assumptions that Khomeini would be only a “spiritual guide” or “Gandhi-like” figure in the new Islamic Republic misjudged Khomeini’s political acumen, especially in his denunciations of the US as the “Great Satan” that helped discredit the

⁵⁸ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Daily Report,” August 1, 1979, NLC-1-11-7-1-0, RAC Project, JCL.

⁵⁹ Telegram, American Embassy in Tehran to Cyrus Vance, July 28, 1979, “Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous)—[5/79-8/79]” folder, Box 20, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

⁶⁰ As cited in Robert Wright, *Our Man in Tehran: The True Story Behind the Secret Mission to Save Six Americans During the Iran Hostage Crisis and the Foreign Ambassador who Worked with the CIA to Bring Them Home* (New York: Other Press, 2010), 100.

more moderate secular leadership.⁶¹ Administration officials consistently underestimated Khomeini and the religious leadership, believing that the secular leaders would “tame” Khomeini and that “although [the secular leaders] lose more often than they win, they are buying time and giving Khomeini the chance to discredit himself by his extremism.”⁶² These officials believed that theocratic government was a relic of the Middle Ages rather than understanding the modern modifications to theocracy of Khomeini’s Islamic Republic. In a top secret “black room report,” policymakers believed that “Khomeini is his own worst enemy. Left to his own devices, he will destroy himself. We should prepare for that event and use our covert assets to urge it along.”⁶³

However, a lack of intelligence clouded US assessments of the political scene in Iran of the ability of the secular leaders or the durability of a Khomeini-led regime. Henry Precht reported in July 1979, “We simply do not have the bios, inventory of political groups or current picture of daily life as it evolves at various levels in Iran. Ignorance here of Iran’s events is massive.”⁶⁴

The transitional period beginning with Khomeini’s arrival in Tehran on February 1 quickly foreshadowed the hostage crisis that would dominate US-Iranian relations for

⁶¹ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 453-454; Mark Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah: The Iran Hostage Crisis—The First Battle in America’s War with Militant Islam* (New York: Grove Press, 2006), 249; Kaufman and Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.*, 193; Gerges, *America and Political Islam*, 62-63.

⁶² Memo, Gary Sick to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “VBB-Iran,” August 2, 1979, NLC-25-141-7-1-0, RAC Project, JCL.

⁶³ “Black Room Report,” n.d., “(Serial)XX-Sensitive 3/79-12/79” folder, Box 38, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL. In a handwritten note at the bottom of the report, Carter wrote, “Be extremely cautious about US action for now, but assess options within CIA. Let them give us analysis of all potential anti-Khomeini elements.”

⁶⁴ As cited in Bill, *The Eagle and the Lion*, 276.

the rest of Carter's presidency. In mid-February, Iranian revolutionaries took Americans hostages in the city and then later stormed the American embassy. In both instances, the Iranian provisional government acted quickly and freed the American hostages. Moreover, in both cases, intermediaries communicated apologies to US officials from Khomeini.⁶⁵ The CIA, however, warned administration officials that the Shia holy month of Moharram (falling in November) could be an occasion for a particularly hostile Iranian outburst against the United States.⁶⁶

In the fall of 1979, the shah announced he had terminal cancer and requested entry to the United States for medical treatment. The request stirred a great debate because some advisors advocated admitting the shah for humanitarian reasons while others proclaimed the potential damage to US-Iranian relations. Carter proceeded on the issue very cautiously, telling his advisors, "I won't have the shah playing tennis in America while our people are at risk in Iran."⁶⁷ When Carter finally decided to admit the shah for medical treatments, he prophetically asked his staff, "What are you guys going to advise me to do if they overrun our embassy and take our people hostage?" After a brief silence, Carter continued, "On that day, we will all sit here with long drawn, white faces and realize we've been had."⁶⁸

⁶⁵ News Cable, "Khomeini Followers Round Up Americans," February 12, 1979, "2/13/79 [4]" folder, Box 120, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL; Sullivan, *Mission to Iran*, 267.

⁶⁶ Intelligence Memorandum, "Iran: The Meaning of Moharram," November 1979, "Iran, 11/79" folder, Box 34B, Office of Chief of Staff—Hamilton Jordan's Confidential File, JCL.

⁶⁷ Walter Mondale, *The Good Fight: A Life in Liberal Politics* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 247.

⁶⁸ As cited in Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 176-177.

After the shah arrived in the United States to begin his cancer treatments, tensions between the United States and Iran quickly escalated. While in Algeria, Brzezinski met informally with Prime Minister Bazargan and Foreign Minister Yazdi. Both men expressed fears of the shah using the United States as a base to launch a counterrevolution. Brzezinski tried to allay their fears by trying to communicate the shah's medical condition to the Iranians to verify the reason for his stay and by encouraging them to sue for the shah's assets in American courts.⁶⁹ This meeting in Algeria stoked suspicions among Iranian radicals of their country returning to the US orbit and that it was a pretext for the return of the shah.⁷⁰

Thus, the final stage for the 444-day hostage crisis arose when Khomeini, unaware of the students planning to take over the US embassy, announced on November 2, "It is incumbent upon students in the secondary schools, the universities and the theology schools to expand their attacks against America and Israel. Thus America will be forced to return the criminal, deposed shah."⁷¹

When a group of militant Iranian students seized the American embassy and took diplomatic personnel hostage on November 4, most members of the Carter administration believed the crisis would be short-lived, like the earlier February 14 embassy seizure. Carter himself recalled, "My impression was that originally [the students] had not intended to remain in the embassy or to hold the Americans captive beyond a few

⁶⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 476.

⁷⁰ Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1982), 105; Harold Saunders, "The Crisis Begins," in Warren Christopher et al, *American Hostages in Iran: The Conduct of a Crisis* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 43.

⁷¹ As cited in Wright, *Our Man in Tehran*, 110.

hours.”⁷² US officials realized its seriousness when a few hours later, Khomeini endorsed the hostage taking by sending his son Ahmed to congratulate the students on seizing this “den of spies” and after secular leaders such as Bazargan and Yazdi resigned from the provisional government.⁷³

The students attacked the embassy not only to demand the return of the shah, but also to protest the improving relationship between the United States and Iran’s secular leadership, best represented by the recent meeting between Bazargan and Brzezinski in Algeria. Although Khomeini did not know of the students’ plans in advance, he quickly endorsed the embassy seizure as a way to consolidate support for the upcoming vote on the Islamic constitution and further cripple the secular leadership in Iran.⁷⁴

The administration experienced some division over how to handle the hostage situation. On one hand, Vance supported saving the hostages’ lives at all costs. On the other hand, Brzezinski was willing to sacrifice their lives to protect the nation’s honor.⁷⁵ Carter straddled the fence between Vance and Brzezinski, later recalling in his spiritual memoirs that his “two preeminent goals” were “to protect the interests and honor of my country and to bring all the hostages back home to safety and freedom.”⁷⁶ However, a lack of intelligence hindered policymakers’ ability to devise more specific plans to

⁷² Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 458. VP Walter Mondale also “expected a quick resolution” where “Khomeini would probably intercede and free the hostages.” Mondale, *The Good Fight*, 249.

⁷³ Wright, *Our Man in Tehran*, 137-138; Jordan, *Crisis*, 105; Kaufman and Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr.*, 194.

⁷⁴ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in American Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983), 375-376.

⁷⁵ Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power*, 198-199.

⁷⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1996), 102.

achieve these objectives of ensuring the safe return of the hostages and maintaining the honor of the country. CIA Director Turner admitted in one early meeting that his agency had practically no information about who captured the embassy and their ties to the Khomeini government.⁷⁷

In hindsight, Sick claimed that policymakers quickly understood that the hostage crisis related to Iranian internal politics as the conservative mullahs sought supremacy over the secular liberals in government. Nevertheless, Sick admitted that he underestimated how long it would take for Khomeini to “make his political point” and his “willingness and ability to absorb external economic and political punishment in pursuit of his revolutionary objectives.”⁷⁸ Shortly after the resignations of Bazargan and Yazdi, Carter asked his staff, “With Bazargan gone, who does that leave us to deal with?” Secretary Vance replied, “The Ayatollah Khomeini.” In a very quiet voice, Carter responded, “I’m afraid I had reached the same conclusion.”⁷⁹

In gathering more intelligence about Khomeini and the new shape of the Iranian government, US officials filtered most of the information through the lens of their biases against the notion of a cleric-led Islamic republic being successful. Policymakers’ tendencies to view Khomeini as “crazy” or “irrational” inhibited planning because Khomeini’s actions in establishing an Islamic republic in Iran ran so counter to their American assumptions of how governments worked in the late 20th century and their

⁷⁷ Harris, *The Crisis*, 210-211.

⁷⁸ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 241-242.

⁷⁹ As cited in Jordan, *Crisis*, 32.

acceptance of the metanarrative of secularization and progress.⁸⁰ The CIA reported on the transition of power in Iran as the Revolutionary Council took on a greater role in day-to-day affairs after Bazargan and Yazdi resigned, noting that council members, mostly Shia clerics, “are unprepared by background and temperament to run the country effectively” and “have little regard for the norms of international diplomacy and are not very concerned about Iran’s foreign image.”⁸¹ Carter was less measured in his perception, expressing in his diary, “The students are still holding our people with the public approval of the idiot Khomeini.”⁸²

Many analysts dismissed the new Iranian government because they seemed culturally biased against Islam as an antiquated religion that fostered aspirations of martyrdom. CIA analyst Richard Lehman explained, “Khomeini’s attempt to rule a semi-developed state of the late twentieth century by the standards of a tenth century theocracy will ultimately fail” and described the Islamic republic as an “anachronism.”⁸³ Gary Sick affirmed this assessment, portraying Khomeini as “a man of the eighth century” who “speaks and thinks a medieval and symbolic language which is incomprehensible to all but those initiated into Shia religious doctrine.”⁸⁴ In complimenting Carter’s handling of

⁸⁰ Both scholars and Carter-era policymakers have expressed these sentiments. Farber, *Taken Hostage*, 5, 158; Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 177; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 197.

⁸¹ CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “Iran: The Revolutionary Council Takes Charge,” November 1979, NLC-25-43-1-2-4, RAC Project, JCL.

⁸² Carter, *White House Diary*, 368.

⁸³ Richard Lehman, “The US Stake in Iran,” n.d., “Iran 11/21-27/79” folder, Box 30, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

⁸⁴ Memo, Gary Sick to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Iran—Next Steps,” December 2, 1979, NLC-25-35-4-7-5, RAC Project, JCL; Despite proclamations by Sick and others that Khomeini had a medieval mindset, scholars such as Nikki Keddie correctly pointed out in academic and popular writings that in fact, Khomeini was introducing new concepts to the Shia tradition and adapting to 20th century circumstances.

the first week of the crisis, psychiatrist Ronnie Heifitz urged the president to consider Khomeini's "suicidal psychology" in all future negotiating efforts.⁸⁵

All the negative assessments of Khomeini and the Revolutionary Council pointed to the immense difficulty the United States would face in trying to free the hostages, a task complicated by the ignorance and feelings of cultural superiority of US policymakers. Experts in the National Security Council quickly dismissed negotiating with Khomeini as fruitless. Sick argued, "we should not assume we are working with an opponent who is capable of exercising real judgments."⁸⁶ Despite feelings that negotiating would be futile, Sick advised Brzezinski, "Khomeini is not going to accept the political costs of giving up the hostages until he is persuaded that continued holding of the hostages is more costly to him than give them up... Our strategy, therefore, must concentrate on making the present situation as costly politically as possible for Khomeini and his followers."⁸⁷ Brzezinski concurred, noting that diplomatic approaches constrained the administration to a "litigational approach" that would create a "prolonged malaise." Instead of an extended negotiating process, he wanted a military strike.⁸⁸

See Nikki Keddie, "Islam and Politics: New Factors in the Equation," *Los Angeles Times*, December 2, 1979 and Nikki Keddie, "Khomeini's Fundamentalism is as Revolutionary as His Politics," *Los Angeles Times*, January 13, 1980.

⁸⁵ Letter, Ronnie Heifitz to Jimmy Carter, November 23, 1979, "3/7/80" folder, Box 173, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

⁸⁶ Memo, Gary Sick to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Iran Breakdown?" November 13, 1979, "Meetings—SCC 200: 11/13/79" folder, Box 30, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

⁸⁷ Memo, Gary Sick to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Iran—Next Steps," January 1, 1980, NLC-33-17-4-3-0, RAC Project, JCL.

⁸⁸ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Iran: What Next?" November 27, 1979, "Meetings—SCC 211: 11/27/79" folder, Box 31, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "NSC Weekly Report #122," December 21, 1979,

Other Iranian experts anticipated similar difficulty in resolving the hostage crisis. When the crisis began, experts in the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence and Research predicted a long, difficult process as its experts feared Khomeini's unpredictable nature.⁸⁹ Former attorney general Ramsey Clark, a friend of secular elements in the new Iranian government, opined "humanitarian appeals to Khomeini are not likely to be productive. His years of exile have not made him sympathetic to the plight of the hostages."⁹⁰

Despite the widespread pessimism about negotiations, Carter and his advisors discussed who would be a proper emissary to visit Khomeini to petition for his assistance in releasing the hostages shortly after the crisis began. They discussed a variety of options including secular and religious figures. Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher suggested former Attorney General Ramsey Clark, a virulently anti-shah advocate who had met with Khomeini during his Paris exile, and congressional staffer William Miller, who had contacts with Khomeini.⁹¹ Clark could not guarantee Khomeini would see him, but he encouraged Carter to contact the ayatollah directly via telephone and speak to him on the basis of a shared commitment to religion. He naively hoped the

"Weekly Reports, 121-135: [12/79-4/80]" folder, Box 42, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

⁸⁹ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 264.

⁹⁰ Memorandum of Conversation, "Clark's Impressions," November 29, 1979, NLC-128-8-9-14-7, RAC Project, JCL.

⁹¹ Summary of Conclusions for Special Coordination Committee Meeting, "Iran," November 5, 1979, "Meetings—SCC 193: 11/5/79" folder, Box 30, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; Jordan, *Crisis*, 33.

president's deep faith and personal testimony could reach Khomeini in ways that secular forms of persuasion could not.⁹²

Clark's assumption that Carter could utilize his own status as a "man of religion" to speak to Khomeini overlooked the vast gulf separating the two men's beliefs. Sick by contrast argued that while Carter was pragmatic in his faith, Khomeini was a "total ideologue" who possessed "absolute and final" answers to all questions.⁹³ Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan recalled that he walked into Carter's personal study adjacent to the Oval Office while the president was writing a personal letter to Khomeini imploring him to receive Clark and Miller as his personal emissaries. Jordan remembered, "I was amused at the idea of the Southern Baptist writing to the Moslem fanatic. What will he say to the man? I thought. Maybe he'll sign the letter 'The Great Satan.'"⁹⁴

The Carter administration also sought to make contact with Khomeini through religious figures appealing to Khomeini on spiritual terms. Carter wrote, "It's almost impossible to deal with a crazy man [Khomeini], except that he does have religious beliefs...I believe that's our ultimate hope for a successful resolution of this problem."⁹⁵

⁹² Sick, *All Fall Down*, 252.

⁹³ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 258.

⁹⁴ Letter, Jimmy Carter to Ayatollah Khomeini, November 6, 1979, "Alpha Channel (Miscellaneous)—[1/80-3/80]" folder, Box 20, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL; Jordan, *Crisis*, 35. Ultimately, the Clark-Miller mission never made it to Tehran because Khomeini refused to see them as they were en route to Iran.

⁹⁵ Carter, *White House Diary*, 368.

The Vatican appeared a likely choice for this strategy of faith-based persuasion since Khomeini considered the pope as his equal.⁹⁶

The pope sent a special representative to Tehran to persuade the ayatollah to release the hostages, but the papal envoy instead received a lecture from Khomeini on November 11.⁹⁷ Khomeini berated the Catholic official, pointing to the Vatican's silence during the shah's reign, "nor did it ever occur to His Eminence, the Pope, to show any concern for our oppressed people, or even to mediate with the plea that oppression cease." Khomeini also warned the pope that he "should realize that certain people claim to be Christians while acting in a manner contrary to the precepts of Jesus Christ" and boldly declared "if Jesus Christ were here today, he would call Carter to account and deliver us from the clutches of this enemy of humanity."⁹⁸ The Iranian embassy published the full version of Khomeini's response to the pope in the November 18 edition of the *New York Times*.⁹⁹

Although lacking official sanction from the Carter administration, pastor Jimmy Allen, the former Southern Baptist Convention president and a close ally of the president, traveled to Tehran as part of a delegation of clergymen invited by Khomeini to discuss religious issues.¹⁰⁰ Upon his return to the United States, Allen wrote a detailed memo to

⁹⁶ Memo, Anne Wexler to Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell, November 7, 1979, "11/7/79-Not Submitted-DF" folder, Box 155, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL; "Nation must decide fate of US hostages—Imam," *Tehran Times*, November 11, 1979.

⁹⁷ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 263; Wright, *Our Man in Tehran*, 172.

⁹⁸ Khomeini, *Islam and Revolution*, 278, 283, 284.

⁹⁹ "Ayatollah Khomeini Defines His Stance in Respect to Embassy Occupation" (advertisement), *New York Times*, November 18, 1979.

¹⁰⁰ Norman Jameson, "Allen in Tehran; Pleads Release," *Baptist Press*, December 27, 1979.

Carter with observations about Khomeini and the revolutionary climate in Iran. Allen commented that Khomeini “think[s] in those terms [his righteous cause] first and in practical geopolitics secondarily,” cautioning Carter not to place too much faith in coercive military, diplomatic, and economic measures. He suggested that Andrew Young might be a good emissary because the Iranian students held American civil rights icon Martin Luther King Jr. in such high esteem, and Young could play on his connections to King, his background as a minister and civil rights activist, and his firing from his ambassadorship after making sympathetic comments to the Palestinian cause. In the margins of Allen’s letter, Carter recommended that Vance and Brzezinski carefully study the pastor’s observations and directed them to “share with others as appropriate.”¹⁰¹

In addition to using other Christian leaders to reach Khomeini on religious terms, Carter and his team launched an outreach campaign to the Islamic world, including Muslim ambassadors, the Habib Chatty of the Islamic League, and various Muslim clergymen in hopes that Khomeini’s fellow Muslims could persuade him to release the hostages.¹⁰² Sick recalled “a number of independent initiatives by Islamic statesman” to negotiate an end to the conflict.¹⁰³

State Department experts in the Iran Working Group worked to establish contacts among the Shia clergy in Iraq in hopes of reaching Khomeini. They also sought to

¹⁰¹ Letter, Jimmy Allen to Jimmy Carter, January 8, 1980, “Iran 1-3/80” folder, Box 23, Plains File—Subject File, JCL.

¹⁰² Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 478, 484; Jordan, *Crisis*, 44; Carter, *White House Diary*, 376; Saunders, “The Crisis Begins,” 68; Memo, Anne Wexler to Hamilton Jordan and Jody Powell, November 7, 1979, “11/7/79-Not Submitted-DF” folder, Box 155, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁰³ Sick, *All Fall Down*, 282.

develop scenarios in which Khomeini freed the hostages as an act of Islamic mercy during the holy month of Moharram. Harold Saunders, assistant secretary of state for the Middle East and head of the Iran Working Group, recalled that “we would look again and again at those events in the Islamic calendar that might be occasions for pardoning prisoners and releasing captives.”¹⁰⁴ In January 1980, a senior Islamic statesman secretly visited Washington in an attempt to repair the damage done to Islam’s image following the capture of the hostages. He prophetically advised Secretary Vance, “You will not get your hostages back until Khomeini has put all the institutions of the Islamic revolution in place.”¹⁰⁵

The administration also considered a wide range of options as it sought to maximize the resources of the American Muslim community to help free the hostages. In early December, Carter met with a number of American Muslim leaders including clerics, scholars, and businessmen to reassure them that their country was not at war with Islam and emphasize their common monotheistic heritage.¹⁰⁶ Shortly thereafter, the Council of Islamic Organizations of America sent Carter a letter pledging their support to freeing the hostages.¹⁰⁷ The administration also considered using black Muslims to reach out to Khomeini. Louis Martin, advisor on black affairs, encouraged Carter to consider sending

¹⁰⁴ Memo, Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, “Iran Update,” November 20, 1979, “Iran: Update, 11/79” folder, Box 32, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL; Saunders, “Diplomacy and Pressure,” 86, 99.

¹⁰⁵ As cited in Saunders, “The Crisis Begins,” 44; Sick, *All Fall Down*, 293; Saunders, “Diplomacy and Pressure,” 102-103.

¹⁰⁶ Memo, Anne Wexler to Jimmy Carter, “Meeting with Leaders of the American Islamic Community,” December 4, 1979, “12/5/79” folder, Box 158, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁰⁷ Letter, Council of Islamic Organizations of America Inc. to Jimmy Carter, November 9, 1979, “CO71 General 1/1/80-1/20/81” folder, Box CO-33, White House Central File—Subject File, JCL.

boxer Muhammad Ali or Nation of Islam leader Wallace Muhammad to plead with Khomeini for the hostages' release.¹⁰⁸

American policymakers also worked with scholars and Muslim clergymen to attempt to make a legal case for the hostages' release based on Islamic law or to provide a possible defense in case Khomeini put the hostages on trial. They tried to use precedents in Islamic law where Islamic rulers had expelled foreign diplomats rather than incarcerating or executing them to convince the Iranians to release the hostages.¹⁰⁹ Based on those precedents, some State Department experts believed that if Khomeini put the hostages on trial, he might use the month of Moharram to declare the hostages guilty and expel them from Iran. However, the CIA saw the potential hostage trials more pessimistically and took Khomeini's rhetoric about the embassy personnel spying at face value.¹¹⁰ Ultimately, these attempts to use Islamic law to free the hostages were fruitless because according to the CIA, Khomeini "has increasingly come to see himself as the

¹⁰⁸ Memo, Louis Martin to Jimmy Carter, "Negotiations for the Release of American Hostages in Iran," November 8, 1979, "11/8/79-Not Submitted-DF" folder, Box 155, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL. Iran denied Muhammad Ali entrance into their country, but Ali was at it again thirty years later, advocating that Iran free a group of American hikers being held hostage. Zoe Fox, "Pleading to Iran: Boxing Great Muhammad Ali Appeals for US Hikers' Release," *Time*, March 17, 2011.

¹⁰⁹ Intelligence Memorandum, "Iran: Possible Trial of the Hostages," November 1979, "Iran 11/1-14/79" folder, Box 29, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL; Contingency Paper, "Trials of Hostages," November 20, 1979, "Iran 11/17-20/79" folder, Box 30, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL; Memo, James Atwood to Warren Christopher, "Legal Considerations Relating to Trials in Tehran," November 18, 1979, NLC-128-8-9-6-6, RAC Project, JCL; Russell Chandler, "Islamic Precedent Found for Iran Acts," *Los Angeles Times*, December 12, 1979.

¹¹⁰ Memo, Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, "Iran Update," November 19, 1979, NLC-128-8-9-6-6, RAC Project, JCL; Jordan, *Crisis*, 67.

Imam, the ultimate interpreter of Islamic law—indeed the very embodiment of Islamic law” in his role as the *velayat-e faqih*.¹¹¹

In early December, the National Security Council and State Department convened a conference of American policymakers and scholars of the Islamic world to consider a long-term strategy for US relations with Muslim countries in the wake of the Iranian Revolution and the hostage crisis.¹¹² The papers at the conference varied in scope from addressing the larger phenomenon of Islamic resurgence to the more specific implications of the Iranian crisis in hopes of avoiding a long-standing conflict with the Islamic world. One paper entitled “Islamic Resurgence: Some Thoughts for Discussion” argued that while Islam “is not confined to one sector or segment of life,” it did not provide the basis for a “single world state,” reaffirming conclusions from the government study in early 1979 that the Islamic resurgence lacked strong transnational tendencies, implying that Iran’s revolution would not be the starting point of a large Islamist movement across the region.¹¹³ However, the CIA’s assessment of the Middle East at the end of 1979 painted a different picture, noting the rising unrest among Shia Muslims in the Persian Gulf and the increasing transnational activities of the Muslim Brotherhood, an Islamist organization active since the 1950s.¹¹⁴

¹¹¹ Intelligence Memorandum, “Iran: Prospects for the Hostages under Khomeini’s Law,” December 1979, “Iran 11/28/79-12/4/79” folder, Box 30, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

¹¹² Memo, Robert Hunter to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Islam,” November 21, 1979, NLC-25-47-7-5-1, RAC Project, JCL; Memo to Robert Hunter, December 5, 1979, NLC-25-47-7-5-1, RAC Project, JCL.

¹¹³ “Islamic Resurgence: Some Thoughts for Discussion,” December 6, 1979, NLC-25-47-7-5-1, RAC Project, JCL.

¹¹⁴ Intelligence Memorandum, “New Realities in the Middle East,” December 1979, “Middle East: 2/79” folder, Box 51, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

The conference also produced papers about the general rise in religious fervor around the world and the specifics of the Iranian crisis. One paper encouraged increased sensitivity among the American policymakers toward the Islamic world in its actions and rhetoric such as the course of US involvement in Arab-Israeli affairs, birth control funded by US economic assistance programs, and human rights rhetoric too grounded in Western values. The writer astutely noted that the Islamic resurgence “is a natural part of a global search for underlying spiritual values in which American society is also involved” and that “actions taken by the US government are likely to be viewed in the Islamic world, however wrongly, as reflecting American spiritual values and be judged accordingly” due to the absence of the notion of separation of church and state among many Muslims.¹¹⁵

Another paper focused exclusively on the Iran issue emphasized the differences between the Shia population of Iran and the majority Sunni population of the Arab world, arguing that US action in Iran would not necessarily create an adverse reaction among Sunni Arabs because of the Shia-Sunni doctrinal divide. However, the author cautioned US policymakers to craft a “selectively Iranian response” that avoided the perception of being “against Islam.”¹¹⁶

During the Christmas season, the conflict between the United States and Iran took an interesting twist after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Government experts, scholars, and journalists already anticipated Soviet fears of the Islamic resurgence

¹¹⁵ “Addressing Islamic Resurgence,” n.d., NLC-25-47-7-5-1, RAC Project, JCL.

¹¹⁶ “Islam and the US Response to the Iran Crisis,” n.d., NLC-25-47-7-5-1, RAC Project, JCL.

affecting the predominantly Muslim populations of its Central Asian republics.¹¹⁷ The Soviets had a track record of involvement in Afghanistan's internal affairs, but this invasion changed the entire geopolitical context of the Iranian hostage crisis and the American strategy to resolve it.¹¹⁸ Brzezinski, the strongest advocate of anti-Soviet views in the administration, began to reconsider his support for a military strike against Iran, fearing that it might thrust Iran into Soviet arms.¹¹⁹ Vance recalled that some Iranian leaders contacted the State Department after the invasion, indicating their willingness to move forward in resolving the crisis so they could focus on defending Iran's northern border with Afghanistan.¹²⁰

The Carter administration wanted Khomeini to end the hostage crisis so that Iran could more easily unite with the rest of the Islamic world against the Soviet presence in Afghanistan.¹²¹ While preparing a speech for Muslim scholars, Carter directed his speechwriter to "have [a] paragraph added referring strongly but indirectly to [Soviet] attempts to subjugate Moslems in Afghanistan."¹²² In addition to the president's public addresses, the Carter administration sought to persuade the member nations of the Islamic Conference to press for an end to the hostage crisis so that it could devote its entire

¹¹⁷ Robert Toth, "Islam Violence Traced to Revived Fundamentalism," *Los Angeles Times*, November 22, 1979.

¹¹⁸ Memo, Hamilton Jordan to Jimmy Carter, February 14, 1980, "Iran 2/80" folder, Box 34B, Office of Chief of Staff—Hamilton Jordan Confidential File, JCL.

¹¹⁹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 485.

¹²⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 400.

¹²¹ Memo, "The Hostage Situation," January 9, 1980, "Iran 1/1-10/80" folder, Box 30, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

¹²² Memo, Hedley Donovan to Jimmy Carter, December 20, 1979, "12/31/79" folder, Box 162, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

attention to Afghanistan.¹²³ Despite its continuing conflict with the United States, Iran still strongly opposed the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and supported the insurgency with training and supplies.¹²⁴

While the government sought avenues to communicate with Khomeini and assure the Islamic world that the United States had no quarrel with it, the administration planned a series of public religious displays to demonstrate American unity and resolve and to keep the American public focused on the return of their countrymen. In the first two weeks, public outreach advisor Anne Wexler and religious liaison Bob Maddox urged Carter to call for a national day of prayer. The president agreed and urged Americans to pray to “seek God’s guidance in our search for peace and human brotherhood, and pray for the safe return of those whose lives are threatened.”¹²⁵ Carter further encouraged American churches to ring their bells to remember the hostages’ absence, a gesture Khomeini lambasted, exclaiming, “Jimmy Carter could be seen trembling today in his cozy White House desperately ringing bells for the hostages and not for God or His messenger the Holy Christ.”¹²⁶ In another symbolic gesture to remember the hostages’ imprisonment, Carter ordered that the national Christmas tree remain partially dark until

¹²³ Summary of Special Meeting, “Iran Strategy,” January 24, 1980, NLC-128-10-7-6-6, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Edmund Muskie to Jimmy Carter, “A Strategy for the New Phase in Iran,” August 1, 1980, NLC-132-81-4-4-7, RAC Project, JCL.

¹²⁴ “Iran to aid Afghan rebels if Soviets not withdrawn,” *Tehran Times*, May 14, 1980; Intelligence Memorandum, “The Deterioration of Soviet-Iranian Relations,” July 1980, NLC-25-44-2-1-3, RAC Project, JCL.

¹²⁵ Memo, Anne Wexler and Bob Maddox to Jimmy Carter, “Special Call to Prayer for the Iranian Crisis,” November 14, 1979, “11/17/79 [2]” folder, Box 156, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹²⁶ Bowden, *Guests of the Ayatollah*, 275; “Ring Bells for God,” *Tehran Times*, December 25, 1979; Iraj Zirakzadeh, “US Counter-moves in Iran and World Revolutions,” *Tehran Times*, January 12, 1980.

they came home. In his public address at the lighting of the tree, the president explained, “the recent events in Iran are an unfortunate example of that misguided application of belief in God.”¹²⁷

Just as Khomeini claimed that “we are not in war with the American people,” Carter and his advisors went to great lengths throughout the crisis in communicating the United States only had a conflict with Khomeini, not the Iranian people or the larger Islamic world and that Americans had “respect and reverence for their religious beliefs.”¹²⁸ In fact, Carter worried in his diary that Khomeini’s actions might harm Islam in the eyes of the world community “if a fanatic like him should commit murder in the name of religion against sixty innocent people.”¹²⁹ At one meeting, Carter declared, “If Khomeini is the religious leader he purports to be, I don’t see how he can condone the holding of our people. There is no recognized religious faith on earth that condones kidnapping.”¹³⁰

In a major press conference, Carter reiterated that no conflict existed between the United States and the Islamic world, pointing to the assistance rendered by Islamic countries and organizations in the crisis, even from unlikely sources like Libya. The

¹²⁷ Jimmy Carter, “Christmas Pageant of Peace Remarks on Lighting the National Community Christmas Tree,” December 13, 1979, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31826>

¹²⁸ “No war with American people; it’s their govt. who betrayed us,” *Tehran Times*, November 10, 1979; “No hatred towards American people: Imam,” *Tehran Times*, December 3, 1979; Memo, Dick McCormack to Jody Powell, “Iran,” November 20, 1979, NLC-42-2-10-2-0, RAC Project, JCL; Carter, *White House Diary*, 373-374.

¹²⁹ Carter, *White House Diary*, 368. Some Islamic leaders privately expressed similar concerns about Khomeini “tarnishing” Islam with the crisis. Harold Saunders, “Diplomacy and Pressure, November 1979-May 1980,” in Warren Christopher et al, *American Hostages in Iran*, 102.

¹³⁰ As cited in Jordan, *Crisis*, 51.

president emphasized that the hostage taking constituted an affront for not only the Islamic faith in general, but also the Shia branch of Islam in particular. Based on the extensive research on Islam produced by government analysts and his own personal study of the Koran prior to the Camp David negotiations, Carter proclaimed the hostage crisis as “the misguided actions of a few people in Iran who are burning with hatred and a desire for revenge, completely contrary to the teachings of the Moslem faith.”¹³¹

In early February 1980, Carter followed the tradition of presidents giving a speech at the National Prayer Breakfast and punctuated his speech with the statement, “Every day, I pray for the Ayatollah Khomeini...It’s not easy to do this, and I have to force myself sometimes to include someone on my list, because I don’t want to acknowledge that that person might be worthy of my love.”¹³²

However, Carter’s profession of his Christian duty to love his enemies muddled the waters of the hostage situation. Many Iranians scoffed at the notion of Carter praying for the ayatollah as ludicrous since the American president was the “Great Satan.”¹³³ The same day Carter spoke at the prayer breakfast, he also made a statement about US relations with the Islamic world in a meeting with Muslim scholars as part of the ongoing effort to reassure Muslims that the United States was not in a war with their religion.

Carter stressed the common belief in one God and the common values of family and

¹³¹ Jimmy Carter, “The President’s News Conference,” November 28, 1979, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31752>; Carter discussed his preparation for Camp David in Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), 9.

¹³² Jimmy Carter, “National Prayer Breakfast Remarks at the Annual Breakfast,” February 7, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32897>.

¹³³ “Carter prays for Imam!” *Tehran Times*, February 9, 1980.

hospitality shared by the predominantly Christian United States and the Islamic world. He also emphasized, “Of course there is indignation among Americans today over events in one Islamic country...But I can assure you that this just anger will not be twisted into a false resentment against Islam or its faithful.”¹³⁴

The Carter administration, especially lower-level policymakers in the Iran Working Group, continued reaching out to the academic community to learn more about Iran, Shia Islam, and the broader Islamic resurgence. The president carefully read their analyses and reports, placing a C on all the reports he read, because he placed such a high importance on resolving the hostage situation and was very hands-on in the various efforts to ensure the hostages’ safe return. With an engineer’s penchant for detail, Carter told reporters that “I have spent hundreds of hours, literally, studying Iran and the composition of its people and the religious and political attitudes, the character of specific people who are involved, so that I can make the proper judgments accordingly.”¹³⁵ In his February 7 meeting with Islamic scholars, President Carter sought advice on how to avoid saying or doing things that would escalate the conflict. Saunders recalled, “Like a lot of White House meetings, this one showed a few key people the President’s concern.”

¹³⁴ Jimmy Carter, “Relations with Islamic Nations Statement by the President,” February 7, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32899>.

¹³⁵ Jimmy Carter, “Interview with the President, Question-and-Answer Session with Reporters from the Westinghouse Broadcasting Company, Inc.,” April 18, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33300>.

¹³⁶ Professor Bill stressed that policymakers should admit the US made mistakes in being so close to the shah's regime and that "Khomeini must feel directly in touch with us."¹³⁷

Despite his meetings with small groups of experts, advocates, and scholars, Carter could not develop a plan to expedite the hostages' release. The president's national security team continued to encourage him to point out in public appearances that the hostage seizure "violates fundamental principles of traditional hospitality and Islamic law."¹³⁸ Carter accepted the advice. In his March 14 press conference, Carter condemned the continued holding of hostages in religious language as "an abhorrent act in direct violation not only of international law but the very Islamic principles which these militants profess to espouse and to support."¹³⁹

Much like earlier attempts to declare the illegality of the seizure of the hostages, the newest attempt in March 1980 proved futile. Douglas Huber, an American working with the government of Bangladesh, wrote the president, "emphasizing the lawlessness of their position I would not expect to be effective. They will be firm that Islamic and revolutionary principles are superior to the moral values we express as international law." He further encouraged the president to seek a US-Iranian dialogue that transformed the

¹³⁶ Saunders, "Diplomacy and Pressure," 124.

¹³⁷ Memo, John Washburn to Henry Precht, "Conversation with Jim Bill," January 27, 1980, NLC-128-8-12-24-2, RAC Project, JCL.

¹³⁸ Memo, Gary Sick to David Aaron, "Black Chamber Meeting," March 12, 1980, NLC-17-64-9-9-5, RAC Project, JCL.

¹³⁹ Jimmy Carter, "The President's News Conference," March 14, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33146>.

status quo where “[the Iranians] have labeled the President a demagogue and we have labeled Iran’s leader a fanatic lunatic.”¹⁴⁰

As frustration mounted with each passing day, Chief of Staff Jordan presented a scenario in which Iran would free the hostages in exchange for a UN commission to investigate atrocities of the shah’s regime, among other stipulations. French lawyer Christian Bourguet and Argentine businessman Hector Villalon touted their contacts within Khomeini’s regime and offered Jordan their assistance in freeing the hostages. Bourguet and Villalon educated US policymakers on the politics of Khomeini’s Iran and even set up a top-secret meeting between Jordan, who went in disguise, and Iranian Foreign Minister Sadegh Ghotbzadeh in Paris.¹⁴¹ Ultimately, the scenario failed because Khomeini wanted the yet-to-be-elected Iranian parliament to decide the issue and refused to hand a victory to secular politicians, such as Ghotbzadeh and President Abolhassan Bani-Sadr, who felt that the hostage situation hurt Iran more than it helped.¹⁴²

Later, in a meeting after the scenario’s failure, Bourguet told Carter and his senior staff, “your humanitarian arguments will never touch the Iranians...because these are the very same people who for years were imprisoned by the Shah, tortured, and have seen many of their friends and family members killed” while they took much better care of the American hostages. Irrate, Carter responded, “I find that sickening!...To punish fifty-three

¹⁴⁰ Letter, Douglas Huber to Jimmy Carter, April 14, 1980, “4/18/80 [1]” folder, Box 181, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁴¹ Jordan, *Crisis*, 115-116, 163-167. Jordan’s memoir is the best work to consult on the details of the Bourguet-Villalon scenario because he was the driving force behind that plan.

¹⁴² Vance, *Hard Choices*, 404; Saunders, “Diplomacy and Pressure,” 136.

innocent human beings violates all the teachings of Christianity and the Moslem faith that I know of.”¹⁴³

After this scenario to free the hostages fell through, it seemed clearer that Khomeini had a personal vendetta against the president. The ayatollah taunted Carter, accusing him of “a satanical conspiracy” and urging him “to abide by the teachings of Jesus Christ, instead of continuously ignoring them.”¹⁴⁴ The CIA suggested that Khomeini made Carter the new object of his wrath after the defeat of the shah and wanted to make the hostage crisis as politically costly for Carter as possible, hoping the president would not win his reelection campaign.¹⁴⁵ Vice-President Mondale believed Khomeini “was a fanatic who thought his opponents were wrong and should be punished for their evil. He hated us, he hated Carter, and we were a wonderful kicking post.”¹⁴⁶

However, Carter himself made the occasional jab at the Iranians. In early April, a group of Iranian diplomats told Henry Precht, the State Department Iran expert, that the hostages were being well-treated and becoming sympathetic to the revolutionary cause. Precht curtly responded, “Bullshit,” a reply that created a media buzz in Washington. Carter read an article about the incident in the *Washington Post* and wrote in the margins,

¹⁴³ Conversation cited in Jordan, *Crisis*, 232-233.

¹⁴⁴ “‘You are following wrong path,’ Imam tells Carter,” *Tehran Times*, April 5, 1980; “Imam asks Pope John Paul II, ‘Advise Mr. Carter to Follow Christ,’” *Tehran Times*, April 16, 1980.

¹⁴⁵ Intelligence Memorandum, “Iran: Implications of the Shah’s Death for the Hostages,” March 1980, NLC-25-43-7-1-9, RAC Project, JCL; Intelligence Memorandum, “Iran: Khomeini Aims to Defeat President Carter,” April 18, 1980, NLC-6-31-3-11-6, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁴⁶ Mondale, *The Good Fight*, 254.

“One of the elements of good diplomatic language is to combine conciseness, clarity, & accuracy. You have mastered this principle.”¹⁴⁷

After experiencing so many disappointments in the negotiation process, Carter accepted Brzezinski’s advice that only a rescue mission would break the ongoing diplomatic deadlock.¹⁴⁸ Brzezinski and other supporters pointed to the successful extrication of six Americans who hid in the Canadian embassy after the students seized the American embassy.¹⁴⁹ Secretary Vance, who ultimately resigned after the rescue attempt, vigorously objected, “Khomeini and his followers, with a Shi’ite affinity for martyrdom, actually might welcome American military action as a way of uniting the Moslem world against the West.”¹⁵⁰ When Vance raised his concerns at a National Security Council meeting prior to the mission, Carter replied firmly, “The Moslem countries may make a few public statements for the sake of Islamic unity, but you know as well as I do that they despise and fear Khomeini and will be snickering at him behind his back.”¹⁵¹

¹⁴⁷ Michael Getler, “Angry American Diplomat Had Just One Word for It,” *Washington Post*, April 8, 1980. A copy of the article with Carter’s comments is located in “4/8/80” folder, Box 179, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁴⁸ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Getting the Hostages Free,” April 10, 1980, “NSC Accomplishments—Iran: 4/80-10/80” folder, Box 34, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

¹⁴⁹ See Wright, *Our Man in Tehran* for a book-length treatment of the CIA rescue of the six American diplomats in the Canadian embassy.

¹⁵⁰ As cited in Gerges, *America and Political Islam*, 43. Vance was very cautious about US-Islamic relations in the aftermath of the hostage taking, the burning of the US embassy in Islamabad, and the attack on the Great Mosque in Mecca and had withdrawn many Foreign Service officers around the region. Sick, *All Fall Down*, 345.

¹⁵¹ As cited in Jordan, *Crisis*, 253-254.

Vance's objections did not impede the president's decision to authorize the rescue mission. During the mission, Carter gave the order to abort the operation when mechanical failures struck the helicopters in the desert outside Tehran. With a somber demeanor, Carter announced the failure of the rescue attempt and the death of several American soldiers as a result of aircraft crashes caused by the malfunctioning technology.

In Iran, Khomeini seized the opportunity to declare victory against the United States, attributing the rescue's failure to "the sand storm which God sent which caused the mission to fail."¹⁵² He also sent a fellow ayatollah to the site of the helicopter crash to say a prayer of thanksgiving for the American failure.¹⁵³

As the Carter administration reflected on the reasons behind the mission's failure, NSC deputy director David Aaron confided to Sick in a "half-joking" manner that perhaps the operation did not succeed because it was "Allah's will." Sick recalled he thought, "The ayatollah would have been pleased."¹⁵⁴

While teaching a Sunday school class about Jesus' admonition to "turn the other cheek" during the lead-up to the 2003 US invasion of Iraq, Carter recalled the pressure he faced during the Iranian hostage crisis to react militarily. He noted "we could have destroyed Iran with our powerful military, but in the process many innocent Iranians would have been killed." In this brief excerpt from his daily devotional book, Carter omitted the fact that he ordered the rescue operation, instead focusing on his

¹⁵² "God Takes Care of Islamic Republic –Imam," *Tehran Times*, July 12, 1980.

¹⁵³ Taheri, *Nest of Spies*, 134.

¹⁵⁴ As cited in Sick, *All Fall Down*, 352.

administration's use of "economic pressure and persistent negotiations."¹⁵⁵ Perhaps the mission's failure shaped Carter's post-presidential religious convictions about the use of force, as he was an outspoken opponent of American military action in Iraq (in 1990 and 2003), in Haiti (1994), and in the recent drone strikes in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁶

Following the failure of Jordan's scenario and the rescue operation, the Carter administration refocused its negotiating efforts on working through Iran's religious leadership to free the hostages rather than its secular officials whom Khomeini consistently undermined. However, Saunders noted that trying to find the intermediaries to reach the religious leaders would be difficult because "Khomeini has shown himself intolerant of the political views of the most respected Shia Ayatollahs in Iran, and is unlikely to be moved by any Islamic figure from outside."¹⁵⁷ Other administration officials considered working again through the Islamic Conference to convince Khomeini and his fellow clerics that "the continued holding of the hostages will not be in their best interest."¹⁵⁸ The Iran Working Group emphasized the difficulty of negotiating with Iran's religious leadership through traditional Western-style pressure because "we are not in a classic bargaining position."¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Through the Year with Jimmy Carter: 366 Daily Meditations from the 39th President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011), Devotional 315.

¹⁵⁶ James Meikle, "Jimmy Carter savages US foreign policy over drone strikes," *The Guardian*, June 25, 2012.

¹⁵⁷ Memo, Harold Saunders to Dave Newsom and Warren Christopher, "Iran Update," May 5, 1980, NLC-128-2-2-3-2, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁵⁸ Memo, "Diplomatic Strategy for Iran—The Period Ahead," n.d., "Iran 5/80" folder, Box 35, Office of Chief of Staff—Hamilton Jordan Confidential File, JCL.

¹⁵⁹ Harold Saunders, "Beginning of the End," in Christopher et al, *American Hostages in Iran*, 284.

Some administration officials only reluctantly agreed to the new negotiating track with the religious leaders because they still viewed the new Islamic Republic with great disdain. Gary Sick wrote, “the present Khomeinist effort to establish a clerical-dominated Islamic Republic is a temporary aberration which cannot and will not succeed. The only interesting questions are when and how it will collapse and what will emerge out of the wreckage to replace it.” To further make his point, he drew an analogy to American history, “imagine the state of this country if the Yippies had seized control of power in 1968.”¹⁶⁰

Many Carter administration officials had high hopes that they could finally reach out to the Iranian religious leadership and secure the release of the hostages after Iraq invaded Iran on September 22. They believed the crisis could be resolved before the election because the Iranian military relied primarily on US military hardware purchased during the shah’s regime and that equipment would need spare parts during a war. Brzezinski quickly suggested that such a strategy would be logical despite his assessment of the “irrational” and “fanatical” character of Iran’s leadership.¹⁶¹ However, this strategy ultimately failed because Iran was too consumed at the beginning of the war to seriously pursue negotiations with the United States and because Israel secretly sold Iran the necessary spare parts for its US-manufactured military equipment.¹⁶² Despite Iranian

¹⁶⁰ Memo, Gary Sick to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Iran,” May 2, 1980, NLC-17-87-6-1-1, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁶¹ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “NSC Weekly Report #156,” October 3, 1980, “Weekly Reports, 151-161: [8/80-12/80]” folder, Box 42, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

¹⁶² Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 272; Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 504.

accusations that the United States had encouraged Iraq's invasion, no evidence exists to suggest American involvement in the beginning of the war.¹⁶³

Despite American hopes that the Iran-Iraq war would lead to a resolution of the hostage situation before the American presidential election, Khomeini was determined not to do anything that might aid Carter's re-election. Iranian President Bani-Sadr warned Khomeini that Reagan would be a much more dangerous American president than Carter, to which the ayatollah responded, "So what if Reagan wins? Nothing will change...He and Carter are both enemies of Islam."¹⁶⁴ On an earlier occasion, Khomeini told PLO leader Yasser Arafat that he would release the hostages only after the presidential election because he wanted to be remembered as "the man who brought down the Shah and the Carter administration."¹⁶⁵

After the two sides settled on the broad outlines of an agreement in the weeks before the election, one of Khomeini's clerical advisors told him that the United States agreed to the conditions "because it would serve the President's interests," to which Khomeini angrily responded that "he did not want to do anything that would help with the reelection of the President."¹⁶⁶ Despite considerable rumors of an October surprise on

¹⁶³ Douglas Little, *American Orientalism: The United States and the Middle East since 1945*, third edition (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008), 227.

¹⁶⁴ As cited in Harris, *The Crisis*, 402. Another Iranian official remarked after the election, "Carter and Reagan don't matter to us as they are only interested in exploiting poor people. Therefore this (the elections) should not be taken as an important event." "Rajai: No Difference to Us as We Follow Independent Policy," *Tehran Times*, November 6, 1980.

¹⁶⁵ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Daily Report," August 12, 1980, NLC-1-16-6-4-3, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁶⁶ Memo, Harold Saunders to Dave Newsom, Warren Christopher, and Edmund Muskie, "Iran Update," October 22, 1980, NLC-128-2-9-6-2, RAC Project, JCL.

the part of both the Carter and Reagan campaigns, the hostages remained in captivity when Election Day arrived, and Reagan won a landslide victory.¹⁶⁷

In a very active “lame duck” period, the Carter team worked overtime to negotiate the release of the hostages and set a deadline of January 16 to reach a deal. If the sides did not come to an agreement, the negotiations would reset and be handled by the incoming Reagan administration.¹⁶⁸ Deputy Secretary Christopher, who oversaw the final negotiations with the Algerians, warned the Iranians “might as well deal with the devil they knew” rather than Reagan, who had used a lot of bellicose rhetoric about the Iranian government during the campaign and the transition.¹⁶⁹

In an ironic end to a conflict defined by religious misunderstanding and cultural biases, an Algerian mediator spoke of the final negotiations process, “These weren’t negotiations. They were more like an extended seminar. In Tehran, we explained to the Iranians the American legal, banking, and political systems. In Washington, we explained the politics of revolutionary Iran.”¹⁷⁰

The Iranians released the hostages just moments after Reagan took the oath of office as a final insult to President Carter. Brzezinski offered the most succinct assessment of the hostage crisis, “Jimmy Carter succeeded in preserving both lives and

¹⁶⁷ For more about the October Surprise conspiracy theory that the Reagan campaign conspired with the Iranians to delay the release of the hostages until after the election, see Gary Sick, *October Surprise: America’s Hostages in Iran and the Election of Ronald Reagan* (New York: Random House, 1991).

¹⁶⁸ Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 275.

¹⁶⁹ Warren Christopher, *Chances of a Lifetime: A Memoir* (New York: Scribner, 2001), 112; “Reagan Fails to See Government in Tehran,” *Tehran Times*, January 12, 1981.

¹⁷⁰ As cited in Saunders, “The Crisis Begins,” 51.

our national interest, but at the cost of his Presidency.”¹⁷¹ Biographer Frye Gaillard defended Carter against critics who described him as weak by pointing out how he prevented the deterioration of US-Iranian relations from becoming a global superpower conflict or a war pitting the United States versus the entire Islamic world.¹⁷²

With the power of hindsight, many former administration officials and scholars point out how the significant attention Carter devoted to the hostage crisis gave Khomeini more power than he might have otherwise had.¹⁷³ Barry Rosen, one of the hostages, remembered seeing a photograph of Carter praying for the hostages and thinking to himself, “I wondered whether he knew that the worst he could do was let the Iranians feel he badly wanted what they were selling. Nothing lowers [the] price so quickly as walking away from an Iranian’s stall.”¹⁷⁴ During the crisis, Senator Robert Byrd (D-WV) told Carter, “The Ayatollah Khomeini doesn’t just have fifty-three hostages. He also has the President hostage.”¹⁷⁵

Throughout the entire tenure of Carter’s presidency, Iran was an unexpectedly significant crisis point that no one anticipated would dominate the attention of policymakers, scholars, journalists, and the entire American population. In a later interview with religion scholar Richard Hutcheson, Carter reflected on how his Christian values affected his response to the hostage crisis. He commented, “The avoidance of

¹⁷¹ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 509.

¹⁷² Frye Gaillard, *Prophet from Plains: Jimmy Carter and His Legacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 39-40.

¹⁷³ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 380; Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 180-181.

¹⁷⁴ As cited in Harris, *The Crisis*, 298.

¹⁷⁵ As cited in Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 268-269.

violence, or the killing of innocent people, an emphasis on human life, were all compatible with Christian principles.” Then he paused and added, “I guess you might add parenthetically, a long-suffering patience was also compatible with Christian principles.”¹⁷⁶ In his spiritual autobiography *Living Faith*, Carter remembered the trying events of the hostage crisis as a time when he prayed more than any other time in his life.¹⁷⁷ Beyond his private prayers, Carter and his advisors sought to increase their understanding of the Islamic character of Iran’s revolution and its new government and to find ways to use religious means first to establish better US-Iranian relations and later to free the hostages. However, the cultural and religious misunderstandings of Carter and his administration plagued their attempts to reach out to Khomeini and his cleric-led government.

¹⁷⁶ Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency*, (New York: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1988), 146-147.

¹⁷⁷ Jimmy Carter, *Living Faith*, 102-104.

Chapter 5

"MY PEOPLE ARE DESTROYED FOR A LACK OF KNOWLEDGE": JIMMY CARTER AND SUPPORTING THE AFGHAN MUJAHIDIN

In a 1998 interview with *Le Monde*, former Carter administration national security advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski noted his advocacy for aiding the Afghan mujahidin in July 1979 in hopes of provoking a Soviet “Vietnam.” The interviewer questioned Brzezinski, “do you regret having supported the Islamic fundamentalists, having given arms and advice to future terrorists?” Brzezinski replied, “What is most important to the history of the world? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet Empire? Some stirred-up Moslems or the liberation of Central Europe and the end of the Cold War?” The interviewer incredulously retorted, “Some stirred-up Moslems? But it has been said and repeated, Islamic fundamentalism represents a world menace today.” Brzezinski dismissively responded, “Nonsense!...That is stupid. There isn’t a global Islam.”¹

Brzezinski’s *Le Monde* interview underscored the Carter administration’s widespread underestimation of the power of religious nationalism among Afghan insurgents fighting Soviet invaders and Afghanistan’s history as a “graveyard of empire.”² According to Fawaz Gerges, successive American administrations of both

¹ As cited in Lloyd C. Gardner, *The Long Road to Baghdad: A History of US Foreign Policy from the 1970s to the Present* (New York: The New Press, 2008), 56-57 and Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil’s Game: How the United States Helped Unleash Fundamentalist Islam* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2005), 265.

² For general histories of Afghanistan and its struggle against outside invaders over its history, see Angelo Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan: A Modern History* (New York: I.B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2003); Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan: A Short History of Its People and Politics* (New York: HarperCollins Perennial, 2002); and Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan: Messianic Terrorism, Tribal Conflicts, and the Failure of the Great Powers* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2011). For a general history of the Great Game, the 19th century imperial competition between Britain and Russia in Afghanistan and Central Asia, see Karl E. Meyer and Shareen Blair Brysac, *Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia* (Washington DC: Counterpoint, 1999).

parties “did not shift their strategic focus away from the Soviet Union, largely perceiving the new Islamists as a mere nuisance rather than a serious threat.”³

President Jimmy Carter and other American officials had just begun grappling with the Islamic resurgence earlier in 1979 with the rise of Khomeini in Iran, but they were not able to decide which elements of Khomeini’s revolution were particular to Shia Iran and which parts had broader implications for the rest of the Muslim world. Ultimately, Carter chose to support the mujahidin on the familiar Cold War terms of the “enemy of my enemy is my friend” rather than fully appreciating the possible consequences of supporting Islamic insurgents. Previously, the United States had conceived of “Islam-as-bulwark” to contain the spread of communism in the strategically vital Middle East, but with the invasion of Afghanistan, Carter administration officials decided to use “Islam-as-sword” through the mujahidin and make the Soviet occupation as costly as possible.⁴

With Brzezinski’s encouragement, Carter moved away from his earlier religiously-inspired rhetoric of championing human rights toward more traditional Cold War confrontational rhetoric and policies.⁵ Early on, Brzezinski tried to convince the

³ Fawaz Gerges, *America and Political Islam: Clash of Cultures or Clash of Interests?* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 60.

⁴ Robert Dreyfuss, *Devil’s Game*, 245; Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2004), 128.

⁵ These events helped Brzezinski win his bureaucratic battle with the State Department in influencing the course of Carter’s foreign policy. Much of the literature covering Carter administration foreign policy discusses the NSC-State feud as a central factor in causing bouts of confusion and incoherence in the administration’s foreign policy. See Jean Garrison, *Games Advisors Play: Foreign Policy in the Nixon and Carter Administrations* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 1999); Jerel A. Rosati, *The Carter Administration’s Quest for Global Community* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1987); Betty Glad, *An Outsider in the White House: Jimmy Carter, His Advisors, and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009).

president to actively confront the Soviet Union. He identified the Muslim populations of the Soviet Central Asian republics as the USSR's most significant vulnerability.

Government experts and journalists alike pointed out that the Central Asian republics contributed to the USSR having the fifth largest Muslim population in the world while also highlighting the pitifully small number of government-approved mosques and clerics.⁶ Beginning in late 1977, Brzezinski supported broadcasting radio programs to Soviet Muslims, distributing copies of the Koran in Central Asian languages, and contacting the few Soviet Muslims permitted to make their pilgrimage to Mecca. However, the State Department, eager to preserve détente, resisted Brzezinski's "nationalities" plan targeting Soviet Muslims, insisting that the US government lacked enough information about the Muslims of Soviet Central Asia to take action.⁷

Although Brzezinski oversaw the creation of the Nationalities Working Group in June 1978 to discuss ways to exploit Islamic hostility against the Soviet Union, his plan of reaching out to Muslim populations in Soviet Central Asia only gained traction after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.⁸ Until April 1978 when Afghan Marxist leader Nur Muhammad Taraki launched a successful coup against President

⁶ Jonathan Steele, "Soviet Muslims make progress near crescent of Islamic turmoil," *The Guardian*, November 23, 1979; Michael Simmons, "Russia feels Islamic wind," *The Guardian*, March 7, 1979; CIA Research Paper, "Muslims in the USSR," February 1980, NLC-23-68-3-2-7, Remote Archives Capture Project (hereafter RAC Project), Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (hereafter JCL).

⁷ Robert M. Gates, *From the Shadows: The Ultimate Insider's Story of Five Presidents and How They Won the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 92-93; Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*, 251, 254.

⁸ Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "SCC Nationalities Working Group—Year-End Report," 12/21/78, NLC-17-151-14-10-0, RAC Project, JCL.

Mohammed Daoud Khan, the Carter administration's interest in Afghanistan focused on fighting the narcotics trade, especially in opium.⁹

Taraki's coup caught the Carter administration offguard because the CIA had ignored Afghanistan's internal politics and lacked reliable information.¹⁰ The intelligence agency rapidly developed sources inside Afghanistan. By the beginning of May, the CIA addressed the Taraki regime's efforts to avoid immediately alienating the Afghan religious community, but added that "although the government denies that it is Communist, popular suspicion of the government will grow as word spreads that the Communists—i.e., the atheists—are in power."¹¹

Through SAVAK, the Shah of Iran's secret police, the CIA connected with Islamic groups opposed to the new regime. Brzezinski wanted to support the nascent resistance immediately after the coup, but at this point, Carter feared creating some sort of theocratic state in Afghanistan.¹² However, US officials acquainted themselves with the groups coalescing to fight the new government. A member of the Muslim Brotherhood, a Muslim political organization with branches all over the Islamic world, reached out to a US air attaché in Kabul to report an upcoming counter coup.¹³ While

⁹ Memo, Peter Bourne to Jimmy Carter, "Specific Recommendations: Afghanistan," August 19, 1977, "8/22/77 [1]" folder, Box 45, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL; Memo, Peter Bourne to Jimmy Carter, "Appointment of Our Ambassador to Afghanistan," January 26, 1978, "1/26/78" folder, Box 70, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁰ Steve Coll, *Ghost Wars: The Secret History of the CIA, Afghanistan, and Bin Laden, from the Soviet Invasion to September 10, 2011* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004), 48.

¹¹ CIA Memorandum, "The New Afghan Government's Relations with the USSR," May 5, 1978, NLC-15-1-2-13-8, RAC Project, JCL.

¹² Gardner, *The Long Road to Baghdad*, 47.

¹³ Memo, "Afghan Counter Coup Plots," July 7, 1978, "Afghanistan: 1/77-3/79" folder, Box 1, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

Carter wanted to stay out of the conflict initially and avoided the counter coup plots, one NSC analyst reported that Pakistan, Iran, and Saudi Arabia wanted to supply the rebels with “covert assistance in the form of funds, weapons, and safe havens, in the case of Pakistan.”¹⁴

In the waning months of 1978 and in the early months of 1979, a resistance effort unfolded in Afghanistan and challenged Taraki’s government forces for control of the countryside.¹⁵ After being preoccupied with normalizing US-Chinese relations and the Camp David Accords, Brzezinski seriously sought to aid the growing Afghan insurgency to undermine the Soviets. Tom Thornton, the NSC’s expert on South Asia, informed Brzezinski,

as the [Taraki] regime gets more embroiled [against the insurgents], it will turn more to the Soviets for help. Some argue that this is against our interests since we would like to see the Afghans be more independent of the Soviets. If you believe as I do, however, that this is a vain hope, then there might be some advantage in getting the Soviets deeply involved.¹⁶

With his interest further stimulated, Brzezinski asked Paul Henze, a NSC officer responsible for intelligence coordination, for “a coherent and systematic plan” to aid the insurgency. Henze explained that the resistance remained too “fragmentary” to produce

¹⁴ Memo, Tom Thornton to Zbigniew Brzezinski and David Aaron, “Opposition in Afghanistan,” July 14, 1978, “Afghanistan: 1/77-3/79” folder, Box 1, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

¹⁵ Cyrus Vance, *Hard Choices: Critical Years in America’s Foreign Policy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1983), 385.

¹⁶ Memo, Tom Thornton to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Afghanistan,” February 1, 1979, NLC-17-88-4-1-2, RAC Project, JCL.

such a plan, and then he reminded his boss that Carter appeared unwilling to “support serious intervention” anyway.¹⁷

However, Carter was aware of the growing conflict in the region. In diary entries over a few weeks in February and March, Carter noted the “increasing turbulence” among “tribal leaders and religious groups” in Afghanistan. At the beginning of April, the CIA briefed Carter about the growing resistance in Afghanistan as well tying that intelligence to the presence of large Muslim populations in Soviet Central Asia.¹⁸ However, intelligence officers, recalling some of the lessons of Vietnam, cautioned the president to not be too sanguine about the insurgency because resistance fighters “can hold their own in the mountains and may even win minor victories against the government, but they have little chance of capturing a major city or waging a successful campaign outside the tribal areas.”¹⁹

The Afghan resistance gained significant momentum and more attention from the Carter administration after a popular uprising and a large-scale mutiny among Afghan government troops in the town of Herat in March 1979. The Taraki regime introduced several secular reforms such as compulsory literacy education for girls and land reforms that took land away from tribal elders and Islamic clerics. These reforms sparked the revolt in Herat.²⁰ The central government carried out these Marxist-inspired reforms in a

¹⁷ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Paul Henze, “Afghanistan,” February 21, 1979, NLC-17-88-4-1-2, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Afghanistan,” February 26, 1979, NLC-17-88-4-1-2, RAC Project, JCL.

¹⁸ Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary*, 297, 305, 306, 311.

¹⁹ “Afghanistan: Prospects for the Insurgents,” n.d., NLC-23-61-2-3-4, RAC Project, JCL.

²⁰ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 39-40.

society that had largely been governed at the local level for decades. Furthermore, the Taraki government attacked the Islamic identity of Afghanistan, repressing mullahs, foregoing the customary civil religious rhetoric of Islam, and using a new all-red flag similar to other Communist nations rather than green, the traditional color of Islam.²¹

Above all, the Afghan insurgents feared becoming just another Soviet republic, such as Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan.²² However, at a meeting of the Soviet Politburo a few weeks after Herat, one official worried about “the flare up of religious fanaticism,” tied to the success of Khomeini’s revolution in Iran.²³ Taraki, believing the Iranians and Pakistanis disguised their regular army soldiers and sent them into Afghanistan, he requested that the Soviets send in regular troops from the Central Asian republics (who looked more like Afghans than ethnic Russians did) masquerading as Afghans to help quell the rebellion.²⁴

Just as Carter and his team were skeptical of the Afghan resistance forces, the Soviet leadership feared the Taraki government had taken Marxist ideology too literally. Soviet intelligence chief Yuri Andropov wrote, “We know about Lenin’s teaching about a revolutionary situation. Whatever situation we are talking about in Afghanistan, it is not that type of situation.” Another Soviet official remarked, “if there is one country in the

²¹ Odd Arne Westad, *The Global Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 307; Olivier Roy, *Islam and Resistance in Afghanistan*, second edition (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 95; Peter Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 133; William Tuohy, “Afghan Islamic Unrest Puts Fear in Regime,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 8, 1979.

²² M. Hassan Kakar, *Afghanistan: The Soviet Invasion and the Afghan Response, 1979-1982* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 111.

²³ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 307-308, 310.

²⁴ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 42; Melvyn P. Leffler, *For the Soul of Mankind: The United States, the Soviet Union, and the Cold War* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2007), 309.

world where we would like not to try scientific socialism at this point in time, it is Afghanistan.”²⁵ Andropov tried to convince Taraki to constructively engage Islamic leaders and not pursue reforms that alienated ordinary Muslims. He failed because Taraki wanted to crush the rebellion.²⁶

Despite their private concerns about the Taraki regime, Soviet leaders publicly accused the United States, Pakistan, China, and Saudi Arabia of interfering in Afghan internal affairs by aiding the resistance as early as August 1978. In the midst of the Herat uprising, an article in *Pravda*, the official Soviet paper, blamed the revolt on outside agitators.²⁷ After receiving a newswire report of the allegation, Carter scrawled a comment in the margins, “Mention atheistic nature of SU/Afghan govts.” Although he was generally respectful of people’s religious beliefs or lack thereof, Carter made a tactical decision to highlight the religious issue to drive home the contrast between the United States as a land of religious freedom and the Soviet Union as an atheistic nation bent on repressing religious expression for the sake of sowing anti-Soviet suspicion among Muslim states. Brzezinski relayed the president’s instructions to Secretary of State Cyrus Vance for the State Department, CIA, and International Communication Agency (ICA) to highlight the atheism of the Marxist Taraki regime and its oppression of Islam.²⁸

²⁵ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 41; Andropov as cited in Angelo Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 85; Soviet official as cited in Martin Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 186.

²⁶ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 45-46.

²⁷ Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 200; Report, “Moscow Sees Feudal, Religious Forces Jeopardizing Regime,” March 21, 1979, NLC-23-61-2-2-5, RAC Project, JCL.

²⁸ Reuters Wire Report, March 29, 1979, NLC-6-1-1-14-8, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Cyrus Vance, “Soviet Allegations Concerning US Role in Afghanistan,” March 30, 1979, NLC-6-1-1-14-8, RAC Project, JCL.

While the Carter administration's denials of Soviet allegations of US support for the rebels were technically correct, officials in the NSC and CIA busily explored the issue of whether such involvement benefited US goals vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Even prior to the Herat revolt, the CIA circulated some options for covert action in supporting the insurgency among senior policymakers.²⁹

At Brzezinski's direction, the CIA began investigating the extent to which the Taraki government constituted a Soviet puppet regime. The CIA's Soviet expert, Arnold Horelick, predicted increasing Soviet intervention in Afghanistan to prop up the Taraki regime, asking "how far would the United States go in responding to Pakistani or Iranian appeals for US support of the cause of the Afghan rebels against Soviet intervention?"³⁰

On March 30, Brzezinski's deputy David Aaron hosted a session of the Special Coordinating Committee to discuss potentially aiding the Afghan insurgents. David Newsom, the Undersecretary of State for Political Affairs, informed the group that the president was determined "to reverse the current Soviet trend and presence in Afghanistan, to demonstrate to the Pakistanis our interest and concern about Soviet involvement, and to demonstrate to the Pakistanis, Saudis, and others our resolve to stop extension of Soviet influence in the Third World." Walter Slocombe, the Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy, wondered aloud if the United States should support

²⁹ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 143-144.

³⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *Power and Principle: Memoirs of the National Security Adviser 1977-1981* (New York: Farrar, Straus, & Giroux, 1983), 345-346; Horelick as cited in Gates, *From the Shadows*, 131-132.

the continuation of the insurgency in order to “[suck] the Soviets into a Vietnamese quagmire.”³¹

In preparation for another SCC meeting on the issue a week later, Horelick told CIA Director Stansfield Turner that support for the insurgents would likely fail to dislodge Taraki from power. However, since the Soviets already blamed the United States for secretly supporting the resistance, Horelick’s sentiment was, as senior CIA officer Robert Gates summarized it, that “covert action would raise the costs to the Soviets and inflame Moslem opinion against them in many countries.”³² Again, administration officials sought to use religion as a tool in the Cold War struggle against the Soviets with little consideration for the future possibility that inflamed Islamic fundamentalists might turn their sights to a new target.

By the summer of 1979, US intelligence reported that the Islamic and tribal resistance to the government had gained even more momentum and that the government had not effectively countered the rebels either militarily or politically.³³ Based on those reports, Carter signed a presidential finding that authorized the CIA to provide nonlethal assistance to the Afghan insurgency, a move the administration had been debating for months. The president approved \$500,000 to provide the rebels with radio equipment, medical supplies, and propaganda assistance. In a second finding, Carter permitted the

³¹ Newsom as cited in Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 44-45; Slocombe as cited in Gates, *From the Shadows*, 144-145.

³² Gates, *From the Shadows*, 145.

³³ Research Paper, “Afghanistan: Ethnic Diversity and Dissidence,” June 1979, “Afghanistan: 4-12/79” folder, Box 1, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL; Vance, *Hard Choices*, 386.

CIA to develop a more extensive propaganda network to further spread the message among the Afghan population that the Taraki regime was nothing but a Soviet puppet.³⁴

After taking the first step of providing nonlethal assistance to the resistance, Brzezinski, in a speech approved by Carter, cautioned the Soviets “to abstain from intervention and from efforts to impose alien doctrines on deeply religious and nationally conscious peoples.”³⁵ In addition to Brzezinski’s public statement, Director Turner and his team began reviewing “enhancement options” that might include arms shipments through Pakistan. On September 20, an interagency meeting discussed the range of US responses if the Soviets launched an invasion of Afghanistan to prop up the increasingly fragile Taraki regime.³⁶

As the Carter administration increased its involvement in Afghanistan, Brzezinski renewed his push to create programs to exploit the differences between the Islamic world and the Soviet Union. Based on the findings of the Nationalities Working Group, he proposed a more assertive approach because the time seemed ripe for such a campaign toward the Islamic world due to the Iranian revolution and the increasing effectiveness of the mujahidin in Afghanistan.³⁷

On December 11, the Special Coordination Committee devoted an entire meeting to broadcasting to the Islamic world. The group discussed not only expanding

³⁴ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 45-46; Gates, *From the Shadows*, 146; Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 198; Walter Mondale, *The Good Fight: A Life in Liberal Politics* (New York: Scribner, 2010), 255.

³⁵ Hedrick Smith, “US is Indirectly Pressing Russians to Halt Afghanistan Intervention,” *New York Times*, August 3, 1979.

³⁶ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 328; Gates, *From the Shadows*, 133.

³⁷ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 428; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Nationalities Working Group Meeting, 16 July 1979,” July 17, 1979, NLC-17-151-14-10-0, RAC Project, JCL.

programming in Islamic languages, but also consulting academic experts to improve the content of the programs in response to the “renaissance” occurring in the Islamic world as a way to foster Muslim goodwill toward the United States, especially because of the hostage situation.³⁸ Brzezinski informed the president about the results and urged him to approve measures to improve American broadcasting capabilities in the Islamic world. However, Carter, a fiscally conservative Democrat, hesitated, not sold on the expenditures necessary to improve the facilities or programming of American broadcasting efforts that had deteriorated through many years of neglect. He wrote in the margins of the memo, “I approve the immediate action, but OMB [Office of Management and Budget] will have to assess for me the other new expansion projects.”³⁹

With Carter’s approval of his short-term broadcasting plans, Brzezinski instructed Vance and Turner to start the immediate expansion of Persian-language broadcasts in programming content and transmitter power because such broadcasts would reach not only Iranian audiences, but some groups within Afghanistan as well.⁴⁰ To implement the president’s instructions, the State Department began inquiring about building new radio facilities in Saudi Arabia and Israel, but broadcasting from either state carried costs. For instance, the Saudis wanted control of the broadcast content to expand their religious influence as the guardian of the Islamic holy places of Mecca and Medina. Meanwhile, radio broadcasts originating from Israel would generate suspicion among Muslim

³⁸ Summary of Conclusions, “Broadcasting and Related Issues,” December 11, 1979, NLC-128-10-5-15-8, RAC Project, JCL.

³⁹ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Broadcasting to Muslims,” December 12, 1979, NLC-128-10-5-14-9, RAC Project, JCL.

⁴⁰ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Cyrus Vance, Stansfield Turner, et al, “Broadcasting to Muslim Audiences,” December 13, 1979, NLC-23-62-6-20-0, RAC Project, JCL.

audiences and officials in the American Embassy in Tel Aviv predicted that the US would have “eventually have to pay indirectly” for transmitters in Israeli territory through the sale of more arms or more sophisticated military equipment.⁴¹

The increasing American broadcasting effort and aid to the Afghan insurgency resulted from CIA reports of buildups of Soviet troops near the border of Afghanistan. Gates recalled that the CIA precisely tracked Soviet military movements, but its analysts had several opinions about the motivations for the mobilization.⁴² For instance, Turner believed that the Soviets would not invade Afghanistan “to avoid deflecting onto themselves any of the militant Islamic hostility now directed against the United States,” referring to the ongoing hostage crisis in Iran.⁴³

American policymakers decided that while they would like to prevent a Soviet invasion to ensure the ratification of SALT II by the US Senate, they would find other avenues to support the Islamic resistance in Afghanistan and make a potential invasion “as expensive as possible” for the Soviets. The Special Coordinating Committee also agreed to continue propaganda efforts “to cast the Soviets as opposing Moslem religious

⁴¹ Telegram, American Embassy in Jidda to Cyrus Vance, “Facilities for Broadcasting to Soviet Muslims,” December 23, 1979, NLC-25-47-2-1-0, RAC Project, JCL; Telegram, American Embassy in Tel Aviv to Cyrus Vance, “Facilities for Broadcasting to Soviet Muslims,” December 27, 1979, NLC-25-47-2-1-0, RAC Project, JCL.

⁴² Gates, *From the Shadows*, 133-134. Such reports include Memo, Stansfield Turner to National Security Council, “Alert Memorandum on USSR-Afghanistan,” September 14, 1979, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan, 1979-1989,” ed. Christian F. Ostermann and Mircea Munteanu, (Washington DC: Wilson Center, 2002), <http://www.wilsoncenter.org/publication/towards-international-history-the-war-afghanistan-1979-1989> (hereafter “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan”) and CIA Intelligence Memorandum, “Soviet Options in Afghanistan,” September 28, 1979, NLC-SAFE 4 A-1-1-9-8, RAC Project, JCL.

⁴³ Memo, Stansfield Turner to National Security Council, “USSR-Afghanistan,” December 19, 1979, NLC-12-1-2-9-6, RAC Project, JCL.

and nationalist expressions.” To achieve that objective, Carter signed another presidential finding to increase contacts with the insurgents.⁴⁴

Even though the Carter administration had effectively tracked Soviet military movements, the Soviets surprised American policymakers when they launched their invasion on Christmas Day 1979, perhaps none more so than President Carter. Rosalynn Carter recalled her husband’s extreme reaction, “I’ve never seen Jimmy more upset than he was the afternoon the Russian invasion was confirmed. ‘We will make sure that Afghanistan will be their Vietnam,’ he said.”⁴⁵ Carter remembered his reaction in his memoirs, “The Soviet Union, like Iran, had acted outrageously, and at the same time had made a tragic miscalculation. I was determined to lead the rest of the world in making it as costly as possible.”⁴⁶

Chief of Staff Hamilton Jordan, celebrating the holidays in Georgia when the invasion happened, experienced a similar sense of surprise when he heard the news. He called the president to see if he should immediately return to Washington. Carter told him to stay in Georgia and compared the Afghan crisis to the current hostage situation in Iran:

This is more serious, Hamilton. Capturing those Americans was an inhumane act committed by a bunch of radicals and condoned by a crazy old man. But this is deliberate aggression that calls into question détente and the way we have been doing business with the Soviets for the past decade. It raises grave questions about Soviet intentions and destroys any chance of getting the SALT Treaty through the Senate. And that makes the prospects of nuclear war even greater.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Summary of Conclusions, “Iran,” December 17, 1979, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan”; Carter, *White House Diary*, 380.

⁴⁵ Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1984), 314-315.

⁴⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 472.

⁴⁷ As cited in Hamilton Jordan, *Crisis: The Last Year of the Carter Presidency* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1982), 99.

Like many of his advisors who underestimated the power of Khomeini's religious appeal, Carter not only discounted Khomeini, but he also did not fully consider the consequences of American support for the religiously-motivated insurgency in Afghanistan. Carter saw Khomeini as an aberrant madman rather than as a part of a larger Islamic resurgence that would produce violent results in the Afghan mujahidin. Instead, Carter focused his attention and energy on the Soviet threat.

Predictably, Brzezinski and Vance interpreted the reasons for the Soviet invasion differently. The national security advisor perceived the invasion as a renewed Soviet effort at global domination, recalling, "To me, it was a vindication of my concern that the Soviets would be emboldened by our lack of response over Ethiopia."⁴⁸ In a memo written the day after the invasion, Brzezinski warned Carter that the invasion posed "an extremely grave challenge" to the United States and that it was "essential" that the insurgency continued with American assistance.⁴⁹

On the other hand, Vance characterized the Soviet invasion as a response to the local problem of shoring up a struggling client state rather than something in a grand scheme.⁵⁰ Ultimately, Carter shared Brzezinski's outlook about the Soviet rationale for invading Afghanistan rather than Vance's more nuanced perspective.

⁴⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 429; For more on the US response to Soviet activity in Ethiopia, see Donna R. Jackson, *Jimmy Carter and the Horn of Africa: Cold War Policy in Ethiopia and Somalia* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, Inc, 2007).

⁴⁹ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan," December 26, 1979, "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [12/26/79-1/4/80]" folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

⁵⁰ Vance, *Hard Choices*, 388.

Although American policymakers disagreed about why the Soviets invaded Afghanistan, the Soviet leadership launched an intervention because they believed Hafizullah Amin, the Afghan president who murdered Taraki to seize control in September, had moved away from a Soviet orientation. Amin had met with American diplomats several times and associated with the Asia Foundation, an organization the KGB linked to the CIA. Moreover, Soviet officials feared that Amin sought a rapprochement with the mujahidin.⁵¹ One official summed it up best, the Soviet leadership feared Amin was “doing a Sadat on us.”⁵²

In addition to their concerns about Amin’s coup, the Soviets launched an invasion of Afghanistan because they feared the rising tide of Islamic religious nationalism, best represented by the Iranian revolution and the attack on the Grand Mosque in Mecca, might spread to Afghanistan and then to its Central Asian republics.⁵³ Soviet leaders also grossly underestimated the mujahidin’s abilities.⁵⁴ Moreover, they miscalculated the international response to their invasion; for instance, Premier Leonid Brezhnev estimated that outrage would subside in a matter of weeks. Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin commented to Brezhnev that Carter was “behaving like a bull in a

⁵¹ Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 47; John Cooley, *Unholy Wars: Afghanistan, America, and International Terrorism*, third edition (Sterling: Pluto Press, 2002), 5, 8; Kakar, *Afghanistan*, 44; Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 89; Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 207, 209; Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 316, 319, 325. For their part, American analysts were confused about the new dynamic that Amin’s coup presented, but speculated that Amin’s coup was not “stage-managed by the Soviets as a way of getting a more acceptable government installed in Kabul.” Memo, Thomas Thornton to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “What are the Soviets Doing in Afghanistan?” September 17, 1979, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan.”

⁵² As cited in Nicholas Evan Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch: Jimmy Carter, the Olympic Boycott, and the Cold War* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 61.

⁵³ Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 162; Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 323.

⁵⁴ Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch*, 68, 72-74.

china shop” while other Soviet leaders believed “the emotional instability of Carter himself or...Brzezinski’s domination over him” caused the American reaction.⁵⁵

In the wake of the invasion, President Carter scheduled a National Security Council meeting with his most senior foreign policy advisors to determine the American response. Prior to the meeting, the CIA, NSC, and State Department worked furiously to offer the president the best available information. The most pressing question revolved around expanding US assistance to the mujahidin. An official at an interagency SCC meeting lamented, “the covert actions that you authorized have been very slow in getting off the ground,” declaring that a rapid Soviet pacification of Afghanistan would be a disaster for the United States.⁵⁶

To effectively increase aid to the insurgents, Carter administration officials knew Pakistani channels remained invaluable, especially since the shah’s demise. Carter’s strong conviction on nuclear nonproliferation complicated US-Pakistani relations, but CIA experts agreed with Brzezinski’s recommendation to Carter that “our security policy toward Pakistan cannot be dictated by our nonproliferation policy.”⁵⁷ However, some of Brzezinski’s lieutenants disagreed about such drastic changes in US-Pakistani relations. Thornton believed India would rise to the occasion and challenge the Soviets if Afghanistan remained a regional conflict and did not become a Cold War battle of Soviet

⁵⁵ Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 9-10; Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 213.

⁵⁶ Summary of Conclusions, “SCC Meeting on Soviet Moves in Afghanistan,” December 26, 1979, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan.”

⁵⁷ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Reflections on Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,” December 26, 1979, “Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [12/26/79-1/4/80]” folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL; CIA Memorandum, “The Troubles in Southwest Asia,” December 26, 1979, NLC-24-102-1-10-0, RAC Project, JCL.

and American proxies, a condition that would be impossible with massive American aid to Pakistan.⁵⁸

At the December 28 NSC meeting, Carter and his foreign policy team discussed a menu of options for responding to the Afghan invasion including support for the insurgents, a grain embargo, and a boycott of the Moscow Olympics. Brzezinski stressed the importance of building international opposition to the invasion, especially among Islamic states.⁵⁹ Most of the policymakers agreed that a Soviet withdrawal was unlikely in the short-term, so they wanted to make the invasion “as costly as possible” for the Soviets.⁶⁰ An angry Carter sought to reorient American foreign policy away from its Soviet obsession, but he wanted to make sure this invasion did not go unpunished. As Cold War scholar Odd Arne Westad observed, “the president surprised even [Brzezinski] by supporting all proposals that were on the table.”⁶¹

Providing lethal assistance to the mujahidin was the most significant decision reached at the NSC meeting. Carter signed a presidential finding authorizing the United States to provide weapons and military training for the insurgents.⁶² The US arms supply operation commenced by providing Soviet-manufactured weapons and antiquated

⁵⁸ Memo, Thomas Thornton and Marshall Brement to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “PRC on West Asia,” December 27, 1979, NLC-24-102-1-10-0, RAC Project, JCL.

⁵⁹ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 473; Summary of Conclusions, “Iran and Afghanistan,” December 28, 1979, “Meetings—SCC 240: 12/28/79” folder, Box 31, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

⁶⁰ Carter, *White House Diary*, 382; Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, “Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan,” December 28, 1979, NLC-25-98-28-2-5, RAC Project, JCL.

⁶¹ Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 328.

⁶² “Finding Pursuant to Section 662 of the Foreign Assistance Act of 1961,” n.d., “Meetings—SCC 240: 12/28/79” folder, Box 31, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

American rifles to the rebels to help conceal American involvement in Afghanistan.⁶³ However, Carter and his advisors did not consider the potentially negative consequences of arming and training the Islamic religious nationalists of the mujahidin because they only focused on gaining advantage vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. No one in the administration foresaw any warning signs about the decision.⁶⁴

In addition to providing arms to the resistance, Carter sent a strongly worded private note to Brezhnev, warning the Soviet premier that the Afghan invasion “represent[ed] an unsettling, dangerous and new stage in your use of military force, which raises deep apprehension about the general trend of Soviet policy.”⁶⁵ Brezhnev tersely responded that the Americans should stop interfering in Afghan internal affairs, justifying the Soviet invasion by claiming the local government invited his troops. In a marginal comment intended for his aides, Carter wrote, “The leaders who ‘requested’ SU presence were assassinated.”⁶⁶

After meeting with all his foreign policy advisors, Carter made a public statement about the invasion, noting, “this is the first venture into a Muslim country by the Soviet

⁶³ Carter, *Keeping Faith*, 475; Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 10; Coll, *Ghost Wars*, 58.

⁶⁴ Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 10-11.

⁶⁵ Letter, Jimmy Carter to Leonid Brezhnev, December 28, 1979, “USSR—Carter/Brezhnev Correspondence [9/79-2/80]” folder, Box 18, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

⁶⁶ Letter, Leonid Brezhnev to Jimmy Carter, December 29, 1979, “USSR—Carter/Brezhnev Correspondence [9/79-2/80]” folder, Box 18, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

Union since the Soviet occupation of Iranian Azerbaijan in the 1940s.”⁶⁷ Another Carter administration official provided a background briefing for the press corps, explaining,

One can, I believe, predict with a high degree of certainty, that the traditional spirit of independence of the Afghani people would express itself through sustained resistance. I think that one has reasons to believe that this will have an impact on the attitude of Moslem people. The Islamic world has been deeply concerned about the denial of religious and political rights to some 50 million Soviet Moslems. It is therefore highly unlikely that the Islamic world will be indifferent to the use of Soviet arms to suppress and to kill Afghans who wish to be independent.⁶⁸

Carter intended these statements to not only inform and inspire the American people, but also to encourage Muslim leaders around the world to see the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan as an atheistic regime waging war on a deeply religious country, not just as a violation of a nation’s sovereignty.

In public speeches in January and February, Carter again sought to emphasize the religious character of this conflict. For his January 4 address to the nation, Carter wrote in the margins to inform his speechwriters that he wanted to highlight the “major effort of atheistic Soviet gov’t to subjugate independent Muslim people of Afghan.”⁶⁹ In various speeches, Carter praised the mujahidin and the character of the Afghan people based on the history of Afghan resistance to invaders and his desire to portray their struggle against the Soviets as a Muslim versus atheist conflict. He used language like “the fiercely independent Muslim people of [Afghanistan],” “an independent, freedom-loving country,

⁶⁷ Jimmy Carter, “American Hostages in Iran and Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan Remarks to Reporters,” December 28, 1979, in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=31881>.

⁶⁸ Background Briefing, December 28, 1979, “12/29/79 [1]” folder, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

⁶⁹ Jimmy Carter Handwritten Notes, January 4, 1980, “1/7/80 [1]” folder, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

a deeply religious country,” and “the courage and tenacity of freedom fighters in [Afghanistan]” to encourage the Afghan resistance.⁷⁰

For his State of the Union address, the president not only enunciated the Carter Doctrine, explaining that the United States would forcefully respond to threats against its interest in the Persian Gulf, but he again reached out to the Islamic world, seeking support for the American effort to induce a Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and free the hostages in Iran. Carter declared, “We believe there are no irreconcilable differences between us and any Islamic nation. We respect the faith of Islam, and we are ready to cooperate with all Moslem countries.”⁷¹

In public and private, Carter transformed into an ardent Cold Warrior because he felt betrayed by the Soviets after his work to shore up détente, pursue additional arms control treaties, and reorient US foreign policy toward issues like human rights. Brzezinski, a strident Cold Warrior, influenced Carter’s transformation, counseling him, “since we have not always followed these verbal protests up with tangible responses, the Soviets may be getting into the habit of disregarding our concern.”⁷²

⁷⁰ Jimmy Carter, “Address to the Nation on the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan,” January 4, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32911>; Jimmy Carter, “‘Meet the Press’ Interview with Bill Monroe, Carl T. Rowan, David Broder, and Judy Woodruff,” January 20, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33060>; Jimmy Carter, “American Legion Remarks at the Legion’s Annual Conference,” February 19, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32949>.

⁷¹ Jimmy Carter, “The State of the Union Address Delivered Before a Joint Session of the Congress,” January 23, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33079>.

⁷² Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Our Response to Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,” December 29, 1979, “Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [12/26/79-1/4/80]” folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

Carter seemed tired of turning the other cheek to the Soviets and sought to demonstrate American resolve to the Soviets, American allies, and the Islamic world. At a NSC meeting on January 2, Carter told his team that the United States would work with its allies “to try to do the maximum, short of a world war, to make the Soviets see that [the invasion] was a major mistake.”⁷³ One NSC official urged Brzezinski to convince Carter to provide “extensive support to Soviet opponents wherever we find them, not on the basis of their worthiness or chances of winning, but on the basis of their ability to tax Soviet power.”⁷⁴

The Carter administration took great interest in the January meeting of the Islamic Conference, discreetly encouraging Saudi Arabia to make the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan the main issue of discussion.⁷⁵ The conference moved its meeting from Singapore to Islamabad to demonstrate support for Pakistan and added the issue of Israel to its agenda to entice leftist Arab states to participate. At the meeting, the delegates decided to expel the Soviet-installed government of Afghanistan from the conference, to condemn the Soviets and demand their withdrawal from the country, and to debate what further measures they could take such as boycotting the Moscow Olympics or all the member countries breaking off diplomatic relations with the Soviet Union.⁷⁶

⁷³ National Security Council Meeting Minutes, “Iran, Christopher Mission to Afghanistan, SALT and Brown Trip to China,” January 2, 1980, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan.”

⁷⁴ Memo, Fritz Ermarth to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “NSC on Afghanistan,” January 2, 1980, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan.”

⁷⁵ Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, “Iran, Christopher Mission to Afghanistan, SALT and Brown Trip to China,” January 2, 1980, NLC-17-2-18-3-9, RAC Project, JCL.

⁷⁶ Tomsen, *The Wars of Afghanistan*, 205; Kakar, *Afghanistan*, 194; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “US Relations with the Radical Arabs,” January 25, 1980, NLC-25-142-6-1-0, RAC Project, JCL; James Sterba, “Moslem Meeting is Urged to Unite Against Moscow,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1980; “Islamic Nations Demand Withdrawal by Russians,” *Hartford Courant*, January 29, 1980; Telegram,

In the midst of these early responses to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Brzezinski renewed his focus on expanding American radio programming to Muslim audiences, building upon the president's December 11 approval of such a plan prior to the invasion. However, the implementation of this new programming proceeded slowly, especially in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB). Brzezinski wrote notes to OMB Director Jim McIntyre and Vice-President Walter Mondale in hopes of expediting implementation, but to little avail.⁷⁷

The cumbersome pace of the federal bureaucracy did not dampen Brzezinski's hopes for an expanded American broadcasting agenda to encourage the Afghan resistance, and also drive a wedge between the Kremlin and its Muslim population. NSC Soviet expert Marshall Brement advised his boss to highlight the contrast between the suppression of Islam in the Soviet Union and the constitutional protections for religious freedom in the United States in his public rhetoric and private conversations with the president.⁷⁸ In a press briefing on December 28, he directly linked the Afghan resistance

American Embassy in Moscow to Cyrus Vance and John Reinhardt, "Soviet Reaction to the Islamabad Conference," January 29, 1980, NLC-132-108-8-4-3, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Ronald Spiers and Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, "The Islamic Conference: Soviets Become the Major Target," January 31, 1980, NLC-4-40-8-20-3, RAC Project, JCL; Intelligence Memorandum, "Worldwide Reaction to the Soviet Invasion of Afghanistan," February 1980, "Afghanistan: 2/80" folder, Box 1, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Cyrus Vance and John Reinhardt, "Afghanistan and Iran Paper," March 24, 1980, "Iran and Afghanistan, SCC Working Group on Public Posture (Memos and Meeting Minutes), 2-5/80" folder, Box 6, Office of National Security Advisor—Jerrald Schecter and Alfred Friendly Press File, JCL.

⁷⁷ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Director of OMB, "Urgent Need to Improve Broadcasting to Muslims," n.d., NLC-23-62-6-20-0, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Walter Mondale, "Broadcasting to the Muslim World," December 28, 1979, NLC-17-38-8-15-8, RAC Project, JCL.

⁷⁸ Memo, Marshall Brement to David Aaron and Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Response to the Soviets Regarding Afghanistan: A Menu of Possible Actions," December 28, 1979, in "Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan"; Memo, Jerry Schecter to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "SCC Working Group on Iran and Afghanistan: Public Posture," January 14, 1980, in "Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan" focused on recounting that history for public consumption.

to the struggles of Muslims living in Soviet Central Asia, noting their common bonds of language and ethnicity.⁷⁹

Brzezinski also hoped that the new broadcasting programs would assist in building support for the United States against the Soviet Union in the Islamic world. NSC Soviet expert Stephen Larrabee advised that the broadcasts should emphasize the “anti-Islamic element [of the Soviet-sponsored government], particularly among countries of Middle East. We should portray regime as a Soviet puppet and Soviet action as anti-Afghan and anti-Moslem. Aim should be to isolate Soviets within Moslem world.” He further explained that the broadcasts should “continue to stress our own common interests with Islamic world, contrasting our approach to internal change with Soviet approach.”⁸⁰

The broadcasting agenda shaped the January 2 NSC meeting among the president’s senior advisors. Carter and his team agreed that the United States should take maximum advantage in the arena of public diplomacy in highlighting the Soviet invasion to Muslim audiences and encourage its allies to follow suit.⁸¹ In a memo to Carter written the day of the meeting, Brzezinski, taking Brehm’s advice, argued that Voice of

⁷⁹ Zbigniew Brzezinski Press Briefing, December 28, 1979, “12/29/79 [1]” folder, Box 161, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

⁸⁰ Memo, Stephen Larrabee to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan,” December 31, 1979, “Afghanistan: 4-12/79” folder, Box 1, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

⁸¹ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Walter Mondale, Cyrus Vance, and Harold Brown, “Results of the NSC Meeting, January 2, 1980,” January 2, 1980, “Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [12/26/79-1/4/80]” folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL; Memo, Christine Dodson to John Reinhardt, “Results of the NSC Meeting of January 2, 1980,” January 8, 1980, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan”; Memo, Peter Tarnoff to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Actions Taken to Carry Out NSC Decisions of January 2, 1980,” January 10, 1980, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan.”

America and other American radio broadcasts should emphasize the history of Russian and Soviet repression of Islam.⁸²

Although implementation proved slow and uneven due to the budgetary process and bureaucratic turf wars between the State Department and the International Communication Agency, Voice of America's (VOA) programming content reflected the spirit of Brzezinski's suggestions and the actions approved by Carter.⁸³ Early on in the crisis, VOA broadcast a seven-part series on Islam to demonstrate to Muslim audiences the American understanding of their religion. The series included a panel of distinguished scholars, Muslim and non-Muslim, from the United States, Canada, Britain, and India, to discuss issues such as the Islamic resurgence and the Muslim populations in Soviet Central Asia.⁸⁴

This VOA series responded to the common perception among many Muslims that Americans lacked understanding that Ayatollah Khomeini and the Shia sect were not representative of all Islam, especially since the Iranian regime had continued holding a group of American hostages. Carter administration officials hoped that the VOA series would also encourage hope among Muslims that it would attempt to be accurate and

⁸² Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Possible Steps in Reaction to Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan," January 2, 1980, "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [12/26/79-1/4/80]" folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

⁸³ "Implementation of Instructions Emerging from January 2, 1980 NSC Meeting," n.d., in "Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan."

⁸⁴ Memo, John Reinhardt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "January 1, 2, and 3 Coverage of Afghanistan and Iran," January 4, 1980, "FGA298-1 1/1/80-1/15/80" folder, Box FG-218, White House Central File—Subject File (hereafter WHCF), JCL; Memo, Charles Bray to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "VOA Output on Iran, Afghanistan, and US-Soviet Relations, January 22-24," January 25, 1980, "FG298-1 1/16/80-1/31/80" folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

sensitive to the history and theology of their faith and that the American people had begun to learn more about Islam.⁸⁵

VOA broadcasts leaned heavily on scholars of Islam and former American diplomats with expertise in the Islamic world to help provide content for their programming. They provided coverage of a three-day conference at the Washington Islamic Center. Famous Orientalist scholar Bernard Lewis gave a series of interviews on “Islam as a Civilizing Force” and “The Uniqueness of Islam,” noting, “Muslims cannot be expected simply to borrow their concepts and institutions from the West. Still less, of course, from atheistic communism.”⁸⁶ Theodore Eliot, the former American ambassador to Afghanistan, dismissed Soviet claims that Islam “flourishes” within its borders, an attempt to persuade the Afghan population of the beneficence of their occupation. Moreover, Eliot argued that the Afghan resistance was “so fierce” because they realized that the atheistic Soviets oppressed Islam and all other religions.⁸⁷

As part of the effort to reach out to the Islamic world to bolster opposition against the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan and support for the release of American hostages in Iran, President Carter met with a group of Islamic scholars and made a statement expressing US friendship toward Muslim peoples everywhere. VOA promptly reported

⁸⁵ Memo, John Reinhardt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Communication with Muslim Countries,” n.d., NLC-15-88-6-37-3, RAC Project, JCL; Graham Hovey, “Voice of America Aims More Programs at Moslems,” *New York Times*, January 10, 1980.

⁸⁶ Memo, John Reinhardt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “VOA Output on Iran, Afghanistan, and US-Soviet Relations, February 8-14,” February 15, 1980, “FG298-1 2/16/80-2/29/80” folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, “Islam as a Civilizing Force,” n.d., “FG298-1 2/16/80-2/29/80” folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, “The Uniqueness of Islam,” February 19, 1980, “FG298-1 2/16/80-2/29/80” folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

⁸⁷ VOA Transcript, “The Embrace of the Bear,” February 13, 1980, “FG298-1 3/16/80-3/17/80” folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

on the meeting and Carter's remarks in English as well as various Islamic languages. ICA officials hoped Muslim audiences would understand that the United States was not opposed to Islam due to the hostage crisis, but that the Soviets had clearly demonstrated their hostility to the Islamic faith in their invasion of Afghanistan.⁸⁸

Voice of America, Radio Free Europe, and Radio Liberty had long provided news to the populations of the world, especially to countries in the Communist bloc that had no other source of news except state-run media. In this way, VOA already did its job in reporting the news to Islamic countries regarding the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. VOA programs pointed to statements by President Carter and other world leaders such as Egyptian President Anwar al-Sadat that condemned the Soviet incursion and their decisions to support Pakistan in the face of a potential invasion.⁸⁹ Radio broadcasts also reported the Islamic Conference's unanimous condemnation of the Soviet Union at their conference in Islamabad and the Soviet media's attempts to distort the meeting's outcome to the Muslim world.⁹⁰

Despite the bureaucratic difficulties in implementing an extensive public diplomacy initiative in the Muslim world, the limited American efforts to expand the

⁸⁸ Memo, John Reinhardt to Hedley Donovan, February 8, 1980, "Iran" folder, Box 2, Records of Hedley Donovan, JCL; Letter sent to all members of the Islamic group who attended meeting with the President from Hedley Donovan, February 12, 1980, "Iran" folder, Box 2, Records of Hedley Donovan, JCL.

⁸⁹ VOA Transcript, "The American Response to Soviet Aggression," January 5, 1980, "FGA298-1 1/1/80-1/15/80" folder, Box FG-218, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, "Afghan-Egypt Update," January 4, 1980, "FGA298-1 1/1/80-1/15/80" folder, Box FG-218, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

⁹⁰ VOA Transcript, "Islamic Meet Ends," January 29, 1980, "FG298-1 2/1/80-2/15/80" folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, "The Islamabad Conference," January 30, 1980, "FG298-1 2/1/80-2/15/80" folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, "Moscow/Afghan," January 30, 1980, "FG298-1 2/1/80-2/15/80" folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, "Islamic Unity," February 6, 1980, "FG298-1 2/1/80-2/15/80" folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

reach of their radio programs to Muslim audiences and focusing the content on Islamic themes and Soviet aggression seemed to have some success. Both State Department and NSC officials reported adequate progress for this public diplomacy strategy, but noted additional work remained in expanding the reach and content of the programming and assessing audience impact. Vance, in particular, noted planning to expand public diplomacy initiatives to include American observances of the 1400th anniversary of Islam, more cultural exchanges, more education on Islam for private sector employees working in Islamic countries, additional Islamic language training for civil servants, and even bringing Islamic journalists to the United States to observe the 1980 presidential election.⁹¹

Carter administration officials also hoped these broadcasts would encourage the Afghan resistance in their “genuine liberation struggle” against Soviet occupiers. These officials debated what exact language to employ in broadcasts and statements, preferring terms such as “resistance forces” to “insurgents” or “rebels” because the latter terms suggested “a legitimacy for the Babrak Karmal government which it does not possess.” Brement also requested that officials making statements use adjectives like “Muslim” or “nationalist” to describe the resistance to point out the religious nature of the Afghan fight against the Soviets and their puppet regime.⁹²

⁹¹ Memo, Paul Henze to Les Denend, “ICA Reports on VOA Output,” February 19, 1980, “FG298-1 2/16/80-2/29/80” folder, Box FG-219, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; Memo, Peter Tarnoff to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “US Relations with the Radical Arabs,” January 16, 1980, NLC-25-142-6-1-0, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, “Blueprint for Implementation of the President’s State of the Union Message,” January 29, 1980, NLC-15-123-9-2-8, RAC Project, JCL.

⁹² Memo, Marshall Brement to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Ten Next Steps,” January 7, 1980, “Afghanistan: 1/1-8/80” folder, Box 1, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File (JCL); Memo, Jerry Schecter to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “SCC Working Group on Iran and Afghanistan: Sixth Meeting,” January 26, 1980, NLC-132-154-5-7-2, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Marshall Brement to David Aaron, “Meeting of the

While President Carter and his foreign policy team sought to shape international perception about the Soviet invasion and cultivate hostility among Muslim countries toward the Soviets, the Afghan resistance provided the boots on the ground fighting the invaders. American intelligence noted on several occasions the resilience of the Afghan resistance, a quality that the Soviets badly underestimated before invading. Analysts agreed that the Soviets would not permanently subdue the resistance, but possibly reduce it “to an acceptable level of annoyance” and “suppress [its] most troublesome aspects.”⁹³

Although the resistance endured against the Soviets, it was also deeply fragmented among tribal, ethnic, and religious lines. Brzezinski remarked that such a divided resistance benefitted US interests because such a “low-level and enduring insurgency is essential to keep the Islamic states mobilized against the Soviets.” A group of Afghanistan experts assembled by the State Department later concurred that the divided nature of the resistance was a strength and that a unified resistance would be weaker in facing the Soviet threat.⁹⁴

Schecter Policy Information Committee, February 1, 1980,” February 1, 1980, NLC-132-108-8-3-4, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Marshall Brement to Zbigniew Brzezinski and David Aaron, “Policy Information Committee Meeting,” March 28, 1980, NLC-13-6-3-18-19, RAC Project, JCL.

⁹³ “Contingencies,” n.d., NLC-15-74-11-9-3, RAC Project, JCL; Summary of Conclusions, “SCC Meeting on Soviet Forces in Afghanistan,” January 2, 1980, in “Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan”; Memo, Stansfield Turner to Jimmy Carter, Walter Mondale, Cyrus Vance, Harold Brown, and Zbigniew Brzezinski, January 15, 1980, NLC-133-42-2-2-3, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, The Situation Room to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Additional Information Items,” January 24, 1980, NLC-1-13-9-9-8, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Daily Report,” March 17, 1980, NLC-1-14-5-16-3, RAC Project, JCL.

⁹⁴ Intelligence Assessment, “Tribalism Versus Communism in Afghanistan: The Cultural Roots of Instability,” January 1980, “Afghanistan: 1/1-8/80” folder, Box 1, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL; Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 216; Summary of Conclusions, “SCC Meeting on Southwest Asia and the Persian Gulf,” January 17, 1980, “Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—[1/80]” folder, Box 15, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL; Memo, Harold Saunders to Cyrus Vance, “Afghanistan Experts on Afghan Neutrality Proposals,” March 30, 1980, NLC-23-46-3-14-8, RAC Project, JCL.

To support the various resistance groups with arms and other supplies, the United States sought to build a coalition of other Muslim countries to assist the Afghan insurgents. However, the American commitment to Israel complicated efforts to find willing partners in the Islamic world. NSC staffer General William Odom suggested that, “the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan should be used to replace Israel as the focal point of Islamic hostility.”⁹⁵ Brzezinski suggested to Carter a broader strategic rationale for Middle East peace beyond the president’s humanitarian commitment to peace, “to mobilize Arab support for our position in the region, and particularly to shore up Islamic opposition against the Soviets, we simply must accelerate our efforts regarding the Palestinians.”⁹⁶

Pakistan, Afghanistan’s southern neighbor, worried less about Israel than the rest of the Islamic world because it faced an immediate security threat from a potential Soviet invasion. Thus, Pakistan became the natural ally for the Carter administration’s efforts to support the resistance in Afghanistan. Shortly after the invasion, Carter sent Brzezinski and Deputy Secretary of State Warren Christopher on a trip to Pakistan to consult with President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq about his country’s supporting the insurgency. Carter instructed his two advisors to tell Zia that the United States would provide military equipment to help Pakistan secure its northern borders. On the issue of the Afghan resistance, the president wanted Brzezinski and Christopher to inform Zia that American

⁹⁵ Memo, William Odom to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Afghan Insurgency,” January 9, 1980, NLC-12-1-3-5-9, RAC Project, JCL

⁹⁶ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, “Summary Report and Recommendations Pakistan/Saudi Arabia,” February 6, 1980, “Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [1/5/80-10/1/80]” folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

objectives included “a neutral Afghanistan” or at least “a protracted resistance that increases the costs to the Soviets and galvanizes world opinion about their aggression.”⁹⁷

Brzezinski and Christopher traveled to Pakistan in January 1980 and met with Zia to reaffirm American security assurances for his country made in 1959 and to offer a \$400 million arms package. Making humorous light of Carter’s former occupation, Zia dismissed the military aid offer as “peanuts.” Brzezinski recounted in his memoirs that while Zia desired American arms, he wanted to publicly distance himself from the United States and work together with other Islamic countries on the issue of Afghanistan to avoid the perception of Pakistan becoming an American client state.⁹⁸

During their mission, Brzezinski and Christopher visited an Afghan refugee camp where the refugees bombarded them with requests for American weapons to fight the Soviets. While there, Brzezinski posed for a provocative photograph, holding an automatic rifle as he looked toward the Pakistani border with Afghanistan. He told the Afghan refugees, “You should know that the entire world is outraged. That land over there is yours. You will go back to it one day, because your fight will prevail and you’ll have...your mosques back again, because your cause is right and God is on your side.”⁹⁹

Despite Brzezinski’s rousing speech invoking religious themes to the Afghan refugees, he was not really concerned with the radical Islamic nature of the Afghan resistance, except in how it could inflict damage to Soviet occupation forces. He agreed,

⁹⁷ Memo, Jimmy Carter to Zbigniew Brzezinski and Warren Christopher, “Your Visit to Pakistan,” n.d., NLC-128R-3-36-74-8, RAC Project, JCL.

⁹⁸ Brzezinski, *Power and Principle*, 449; Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason & Power: American Diplomacy in the Carter Years* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1986), 232.

⁹⁹ Brzezinski as cited in Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 212.

on Carter's behalf, to Zia's preconditions that arms supplied by the United States must be distributed by Pakistan's intelligence service, the ISI, to any group of the ISI's choosing. The ISI also provided much of the training for the mujahidin forces who operated out of Pakistan. One month later, Brzezinski traveled again to Pakistan to meet with Zia to discuss further expanding the arms supply to Pakistan and the Afghan insurgents, with Saudi Arabia matching US expenditures dollar-for-dollar.¹⁰⁰

The Pakistanis were not a passive third party in the American covert operation supplying arms to the Afghan resistance. Zia, the nation's embattled military dictator, hoped to use his power of distributing arms and money to the Afghan freedom fighters as a way to present himself as a courageous leader in the rest of the Islamic world. Thus, the US and other countries funneled most of their covert arms to Islamic religious nationalist resistance groups rather than secular organizations.¹⁰¹ Zia also asserted his own nationalist credentials to the rest of the world to avoid the perception that he would become another shah-type leader dependent on US military aid. He declared, "If 80-million people cannot safeguard their own freedom then nobody else in this world can do anything for them to safeguard their own freedom and integrity."¹⁰²

Despite Zia's proclamation about Pakistan defending itself from potential Soviet aggression, the country's military was ill-prepared for such a possibility. Brzezinski

¹⁰⁰ Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 41-42, 45; Gates, *From the Shadows*, 148.

¹⁰¹ Rasanayagam, *Afghanistan*, 102; Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 47.

¹⁰² Caryle Murphy, "Pakistani Calls for US to Arm Afghan Rebels," *Washington Post*, April 18, 1980.

reported to the president that Pakistan's army had "poor equipment, no infrastructure, little effective communications."¹⁰³

To fund military aid to Pakistan (and covertly to the Afghan resistance), the Carter administration sought other supporters to supplement the American effort. American policymakers targeted Saudi Arabia as the primary source of support because of its tremendous oil wealth. They also sought to foster a closer US-Saudi relationship to avert future oil price crises. One NSC official advised Brzezinski to contact Saudi Arabia "with [the] aim of getting them to bankroll arms to Pakistan and insurgents."¹⁰⁴ Brzezinski passed along the suggestion to Carter that the burden of funding the operation "might be shared with Saudi Arabia."¹⁰⁵ On their January trip to Pakistan, Brzezinski and Christopher met with the Saudis, whom Vance described as "generally responsive to our initial request for assistance for Pakistan."¹⁰⁶

The Saudis were very happy to provide matching funds for the Pakistanis and the Afghan insurgents. Saudi Arabia, the protector of the Islamic holy places of Mecca and Medina, wanted to assist in the effort to support the mujahidin's struggle against the

¹⁰³ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Summary Report and Recommendations Pakistan/Saudi Arabia," February 6, 1980, "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [1/5/80-10/1/80]" folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

¹⁰⁴ Memo, Stephen Larrabee to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Soviet Intervention in Afghanistan," December 31, 1979, "Afghanistan: 4-12/79" folder, Box 1, Office of National Security Advisor—Country File, JCL.

¹⁰⁵ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Strategic Reaction to the Afghanistan Problem," January 3, 1980, "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [12/26/79-1/4/80]" folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL.

¹⁰⁶ Memo, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, "Blueprint for Implementation of the President's State of the Union Message," January 29, 1980, NLC-15-123-9-2-8, RAC Project, JCL.

atheistic Soviet Union. Prince Turk al-Faisal, head of Saudi intelligence, said, “We don’t do operations. We don’t know how. All we know how to do is write checks.”¹⁰⁷

Although the Saudis provided a lot of financial support, Egypt was the major supplier of weapons to the insurgents in the first two years after the Soviet invasion. Sadat provided support for the resistance in the form of weapons, training, food, and even clothes from his own wardrobe.¹⁰⁸ Brzezinski also visited Cairo to build up a coalition of supporters for the Afghan insurgents. Sadat willingly agreed to help supply the Afghan forces with Soviet-made weapons as he received more American financial and military assistance after signing a peace treaty with Israel. He also orchestrated support for the Afghan resistance among Islamist organizations in Egypt which was the most important center for Islamist religious nationalist thought. Sadat had a turbulent relationship with Islamist groups, frequently using them to achieve his political goals. For instance, he freed a number of activists jailed during Nasser’s regime when he first took office and then later repressed these same groups for their opposition to the Camp David Accords. Ultimately, Islamist extremists would assassinate Sadat.¹⁰⁹

While Brzezinski traveled to Cairo, Islamabad, and Riyadh seeking assistance for American efforts to aid Pakistan and the mujahidin, Secretary of Defense Harold Brown traveled to Beijing to request support from the Chinese who had good relations with

¹⁰⁷ As cited in Westad, *The Global Cold War*, 329-330.

¹⁰⁸ Kakar, *Afghanistan*, 147; “Sadat Says Egypt to Send Arms to Afghan Rebels,” *Washington Post*, December 26, 1980.

¹⁰⁹ Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 20-24.

Pakistan, Egypt, and several Afghan resistance groups.¹¹⁰ Brown met with the Chinese, offering a most-favored nation trade agreement, increased US-PRC military cooperation, and partial reimbursement for shipping arms to Afghanistan in return for China's support of American efforts to bog down the Soviets in Afghanistan.¹¹¹

The United States turned to other sources for support as well because the Carter administration received little assistance from the Western European allies.¹¹² For instance, the CIA used anti-Soviet drug traffickers in Afghanistan to supplement American covert assistance to the mujahidin.¹¹³ Even Israel secretly provided support to the mujahidin as part of a larger effort backing Islamists against secular nationalist forces, such as Syria, Iraq, and the PLO, that posed the most immediate threat to Israel at that time.¹¹⁴

Although the covert American arms supply to the resistance had just begun in the first months after the invasion, the Afghan insurgents had successfully contained the Soviets and their puppet regime to the cities. Soviet tactical errors contributed much to the resistance's early success because the Soviet military leadership trained their troops to

¹¹⁰ "Accelerated Diplomatic Strategy," n.d., NLC-31-217-21-1-3, RAC Project, JCL; Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 35.

¹¹¹ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "Strategic Reaction to the Afghanistan Problem," January 3, 1980, "Southwest Asia/Persian Gulf—Afghanistan: [12/26/79-1/4/80]" folder, Box 17, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Geographic File, JCL; Special Coordination Committee Meeting Notes, "Afghanistan: Harold Brown's Trip to China," January 2, 1980, in "Towards an International History of the War in Afghanistan"; Memo, Cyrus Vance to Jimmy Carter, "Blueprint for Implementation of the President's State of the Union Message," January 29, 1980, NLC-15-123-9-2-8, RAC Project, JCL; Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled*, 221; Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 52.

¹¹² Summary of Conclusions, "SCC Iran, January 29, 1980," January 29, 1980, NLC-25-99-11-6-8, RAC Project, JCL.

¹¹³ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, the Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York: Three Leaves Press, 2004), 141.

¹¹⁴ Dreyfuss, *Devil's Game*, 206.

fight a conventional war in Europe against NATO forces rather than fight a guerrilla war in the mountains of Afghanistan. By summertime, the Soviets adjusted their tactics to use helicopters rather than tanks in fighting the insurgents, but by this time, the Carter administration's arms supply operation had become more effective.¹¹⁵

In mid-March, Carter and his team met together to assess all their efforts in aiding the Afghan resistance against the Soviets. As part of that reassessment, Brzezinski urged Carter to authorize the introduction of anti-helicopter weapons to counter the Soviets' adjusted counterinsurgency tactics.¹¹⁶ However, Carter hesitated, not seeing immediate benefits. He also believed that articulating American support for a neutral Afghanistan would prevent further tensions within NATO.¹¹⁷

Although reluctant, Carter increased the types of arms being sent to Afghanistan to make the Soviet occupation a costly venture. He prioritized the American-Soviet competition over understanding the latent anti-Americanism developing in the mujahidin organizations his administration supported. However, he had to maintain the public sham that the United States was not involved in supplying weapons to Islamic forces in Afghanistan. At an April Q&A session with journalists, Carter denied that his administration sent weapons to the Afghan insurgents, claiming "the Afghan freedom

¹¹⁵ Sarantakes, *Dropping the Torch*, 69; Kakar, *Afghanistan*, 126; Ewans, *Afghanistan*, 221.

¹¹⁶ Memo, Zbigniew Brzezinski to Jimmy Carter, "NSC Meeting," March 18, 1980, NLC-17-131-4-2-2, RAC Project, JCL.

¹¹⁷ Minutes of National Security Council Meeting, March 18, 1980, NLC-17-2-19-4-7, RAC Project, JCL.

fighters are doing very well on their own in getting weapons away from their own previous armed forces and also perhaps some from the Soviet invaders.”¹¹⁸

Even though Carter and his team focused on the mujahidin primarily in the context of inflicting damage on the Soviets, they did not ignore religion entirely as the administration still sought to make religious appeals to “maintain Islamic outrage at the Soviet actions in Afghanistan.”¹¹⁹ An Islamic Conference meeting in May became a focal point of this effort as American ambassadors in Muslim countries urged their host governments to focus on the Soviet subjugation of their co-religionists in Afghanistan.¹²⁰

The Soviets also tried to influence the outcome of the Islamic Conference, assuring attendees of their eventual withdrawal from Afghanistan. They also sought to focus attention on the aborted American military rescue mission in Iran.¹²¹ Although the delegates spent more time discussing other issues such as Iran and Israel-Palestine, they largely reaffirmed the resolution from January’s meeting that condemned the Soviet invasion and established a standing committee to seek a withdrawal of Soviet troops and ensure Afghan sovereignty.¹²²

¹¹⁸ Jimmy Carter, “Interview with the President Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session with Editors and Broadcasters,” April 11, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=33264>.

¹¹⁹ Discussion Paper, “Foreign Policy: Coherence and Sense of Direction,” n.d., “Meetings—SCC 293: 3/25/80” folder, Box 32, Zbigniew Brzezinski Donated Materials Collection—Subject File, JCL.

¹²⁰ Memo, Peter Tarnoff to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Islamic Conference May Meeting,” August 11, 1980, NLC-15-33-4-3-2, RAC Project, JCL.

¹²¹ Jim Gallagher, “Soviets Seek Softening of Islamic Position,” *Hartford Courant*, May 17, 1980; Marvine Howe, “Anti-US Mood Seen at Islamic Meeting,” *New York Times*, May 17, 1980.

¹²² Marvine Howe, “Islamic Conference Ends; Afghanistan Talks Proposed,” *New York Times*, May 23, 1980.

As part of the US-Soviet struggle to influence the course of the Islamic Conference, VOA reporters were on the scene to broadcast the proceedings of the meeting to Muslim audiences. The VOA reporters also conducted interviews with representatives from the various countries and from the Afghan resistance to publicize opposition to the continuing Soviet presence in Afghanistan.¹²³

Although VOA continued an active program of outreach to Muslim audiences, the American broadcasting effort had come under fire from *Washington Post* columnist Michael Getler earlier in May. His article illustrated some of the larger American challenges in reaching out to the Islamic world, especially in the area of language expertise. He argued that the Americans tried to reach the Afghans by broadcasting in Farsi, a language mainly understood by the upper class, rather than the more widely spoken languages of Pushtu and Dari. Getler interviewed Thomas Gouttierre, director of the University of Nebraska's Center for Afghan Studies, who explained that the Farsi spoken in VOA broadcasts was "a very literary form of Persian. It's stilted and certainly hard for Afghans to understand. If we are really trying to get information to Afghans, we are limiting our potential." However, Gouttierre acknowledged that most of his Afghan friends point to the VOA and the British BBC "as the only real source of information" in the country.¹²⁴

The Carter administration immediately responded to the withering criticism from the *Washington Post* column by pushing for six new positions at VOA who would

¹²³ Memo, Charles Bray to Zbigniew Brzezinski, "International Communication Agency Activities on Iran, Afghanistan, and US-Soviet Relations," May 23, 1980, "FG298-1 5/1/80-6/3/80" folder, Box FG-220, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

¹²⁴ Michael Getler, "Voice of America is Speaking in Strange Tongue to Afghans," *Washington Post*, May 2, 1980.

specialize in the Dari language. NSC officials hoped to start broadcasting a half-hour news segment in Dari within ninety days, but the bureaucratic battle of securing the necessary funding that had plagued the broadcasting program from the beginning continued as Carter continued to insist on fiscal discipline to counter rising military spending. Almost all the success of expanding American broadcasting to Muslim audiences came from diverting money from other ICA programs in other regions of the world.¹²⁵

Despite the problems in the American broadcasting program, the American military aid covertly supplied to the mujahidin worked very well. A *Los Angeles Times* reporter explained, “the Afghan government, with Soviet help, controls less of the countryside today than the Afghan army alone did before the massive Soviet invasion last December.”¹²⁶ American intelligence analysts reported, “resistance groups have continued to operate with impunity in the countryside...[and now] insurgents are moving closer to urban centers and are repeatedly cutting road links serving them,” but noted that the fighters had looming problems in getting enough ammunition and food.¹²⁷

¹²⁵ “Public Affairs Strategy on Afghanistan,” n.d., NLC-13-6-3-19-8, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Marshall Brement to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “SCC Consideration of Activities of Policy Information Committee,” May 19, 1980, NLC-15-1-7-13-3, RAC Project, JCL; “VOA Broadcasts in Dari and Other Islamic World Languages,” May 30, 1980, “International Communication Agency [2]” folder, Box 193, Office of Chief of Staff—George Moffett Subject File, JCL; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “Expanded Radio Broadcasting,” June 13, 1980, NLC-33-13-42-3-2, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Paul Henze to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “BIB and RFE/RL Muslim-Language Broadcasts,” August 7, 1980, NLC-27-5-10-7-9, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, Richard Cohen to George Moffett, November 13, 1980, “International Communication Agency [1]” folder, Box 193, Office of Chief of Staff—George Moffett Subject File, JCL.

¹²⁶ Tyler Marshall, “Soviets Appear Mired by Afghan Rebel Resistance,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1980.

¹²⁷ “Situation in Afghanistan,” June 10, 1980, NLC-23-46-5-2-9, RAC Project, JCL.

The success of the Carter administration's covert supply program raised concerns about potential Soviet reprisals against Pakistan. The mujahidin increasingly relied on support from Pakistan, whether from foreign governments or from their families living in refugee camps. Wary of the prospect of a Soviet strike into Pakistan, Turner declared, "we have to ask ourselves how important it is for us to frustrate what the Soviets are trying to do in Afghanistan."¹²⁸ In October, President Zia expressed to Carter his concern of Soviet retaliation, despite his denials of Pakistani aid to the mujahidin, telling him that Pakistan would need more assistance in the case of such an attack.¹²⁹

Despite concerns of a Soviet reprisal against Pakistan, Carter and his team looked to continue expanding aid to the mujahidin not only with weapons, but food as well.¹³⁰ However, Brzezinski remained unsatisfied, believing the CIA should primarily continue to expand the arms supply operation. After hearing Brzezinski's complaints in an October meeting, Turner committed the CIA to "pushing everything through the pipeline that the Pakistanis were willing to receive."¹³¹

Carter's advisors directed the course of the program aiding the mujahidin because the president dedicated most of his attention for the rest of his term to getting the hostages released and campaigning for his re-election. Lower-echelon policymakers

¹²⁸ Report, "Soviet Intentions vis-à-vis Pakistan," July 14, 1980, NLC-12-36-1-5-3, RAC Project, JCL; Memo, "Minutes—PRC Meeting on Pakistan," July 17, 1980, NLC-132-80-8-5-3, RAC Project, JCL.

¹²⁹ Memorandum of Conversation, "President Jimmy Carter and President Mohammad Zia-ul-Haq," October 3, 1980, NLC-128-3-36-2-5, RAC Project, JCL; Della Denman, "Weapons filter through to Muslim rebels," *The Guardian*, October 28, 1980.

¹³⁰ Memo, Henry Owen to Edmund Muskie, "US Food Aid to Afghanistan Resistance," August 13, 1980, NLC-19-54-1-1-0, RAC Project, JCL.

¹³¹ Gates, *From the Shadows*, 148-149; Cooley, *Unholy Wars*, 46.

participated in the Middle East Studies Association conference in Washington DC after the election to hear what academics said about American efforts in Afghanistan. One scholar criticized the American approach to Afghanistan, chiding policymakers, “Our government made the invasion of Afghanistan an American-Soviet superpower confrontation—rather than allowing the Islamic states to make it a matter of highest priority for Islam and their own national sovereignty.” VOA reporters in attendance prepared favorable broadcasts and a special segment to reflect on the one-year anniversary of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.¹³²

As Carter prepared to leave office, the mujahidin seemed to be performing well against the Soviet occupiers and their Afghan puppet regime, partly as a result of the burgeoning covert arms supply operation that Carter had authorized. One reporter claimed, “government forces can travel on key highways only under heavy military escort, while rebels move openly through major cities, including the capital of Kabul.”¹³³ VOA broadcasts highlighted the success of the mujahidin against the Soviets in many of its news segments transmitted to Muslim audiences to encourage other Islamic countries to support the continuation of the resistance.¹³⁴

¹³² Memo, John Reinhardt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “International Communication Agency Activities on Iran, Afghanistan, and US-Soviet Relations,” November 21, 1980, “FG 298 11/1/80-1/20/81” folder, Box FG-218, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, “US Scholars on Afghanistan,” November 12, 1980, “FG 298 11/1/80-1/20/81” folder, Box FG-218, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, “US Scholars Dissect the Afghanistan Situation,” November 13, 1980, “FG 298 11/1/80-1/20/81” folder, Box FG-218, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; Memo, John Reinhardt to Zbigniew Brzezinski, “International Communication Agency Activities on Iran, Afghanistan, and US-Soviet Relations,” December 12, 1980, “FG 298-1 11/16/80-1/20/81” folder, Box FG-221, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

¹³³ Stuart Auerbach, “One Year after the Soviet Invasion, Afghanistan’s Rebels Fight On,” *Washington Post*, December 27, 1980; “The Afghans are Far from Conquered,” *New York Times*, December 27, 1980.

¹³⁴ VOA Transcript, “Paktiawal Interview,” November 17, 1980, “FG 298 11/1/80-1/20/81” folder, Box FG-218, WHCF—Subject File, JCL; VOA Transcript, “Anti-Soviet Fighting Widespread in Afghanistan,” November 17, 1980, “FG 298 11/1/80-1/20/81” folder, Box FG-218, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

Several years after leaving office, Carter traveled to Pakistan on behalf of his newly-established Carter Center to discuss health program initiatives with Zia. While there, the former president traveled to the Khyber Pass, the same site of the controversial Brzezinski photograph and a major center for Afghan refugees. Carter recounted, “several thousand Afghan freedom fighters assembled under a large tent to welcome me and express thanks for American assistance in their struggle against the occupying Soviets.”¹³⁵

Carter remained involved in Pakistan in his post-presidential ventures through the Carter Center. The Center’s most important achievements in Pakistan were its eradication of Guinea worm disease in 1992 and its ongoing campaign to prevent neonatal tetanus disease. Although not directly involved in observing elections or negotiations, Carter made public statements calling for free and open elections at the end of General Pervez Musharraf’s rule and recommended compromises for Pakistan and India in their continuing dispute over Kashmir. The former president has not worked in Afghanistan due to the seemingly perpetual political instability there since the Soviet withdrawal.¹³⁶

By the time the Soviets invaded Afghanistan in December 1979, Brzezinski’s anti-Soviet worldview had become the dominant guiding force in Carter administration foreign policy. Carter authorized a program to support the Afghan mujahidin with arms and other supplies in their fight against the Soviet Union. He also decided to launch a major expansion in American broadcasting to Muslim audiences, hoping to curry

¹³⁵ Carter, *White House Diary*, 311-312.

¹³⁶ <http://www.cartercenter.org/countries/index.html>

influence with them on religious terms. However, both of these actions did not consider the long-range implications of supporting the religious nationalist Muslims that made up much of the mujahidin because Carter prioritized the US-Soviet competition above all other factors in his decision making.

Over the next several decades, the United States has experienced the blowback from Carter's and Ronald Reagan's decisions to further expand American involvement in funding the mujahidin. Radical Islamist groups received most of the arms because the United States ceded control of the distribution of its weapons to Pakistani intelligence, who favored many of the most radical resistance organizations. Throughout the 1980s, Muslim radicals from across the Islamic world, including Osama bin Laden, traveled to Afghanistan to fight the Soviets. Their eventual success in driving out the Soviets created a global consciousness among these foreign fighters, which led to the evolution of a transnational Jihadist ideology rather than the indigenous Afghan religious nationalist resistance that Carter's administration originally supported.¹³⁷ Early into Reagan's term, one Afghan prophetically warned the Americans, "For God's sake, you're financing your own assassins."¹³⁸

¹³⁷ Reza Aslan, *Beyond Fundamentalism: Confronting Religious Extremism in the Age of Globalization* (New York: Random House, 2010), 31-32.

¹³⁸ As cited in Glad, *An Outsider in the White House*, 214.

Chapter 6

"A PROPHET WITHOUT HONOR": JIMMY CARTER AND THE RISE OF THE CHRISTIAN RIGHT

At the 1976 Southern Baptist Convention (SBC) in Norfolk, Virginia, Bailey Smith, pastor of the First Baptist Church in Del City, Oklahoma, offered a resounding endorsement for Jimmy Carter's presidential candidacy. Smith exclaimed that the US needed "a born-again man in the White House. And his initials are the same as our Lord's!"¹ Four years later on August 7, 1980, President Jimmy Carter welcomed Smith and his wife to the Oval Office to celebrate Smith's election as president of the SBC. Carter and Smith briefly exchanged pleasantries, but their meeting ended on a sour note. Carter remembered,

As he and his wife were leaving, he said, 'We are praying, Mr. President, that you will abandon secular humanism as your religion.' This was a shock to me. I didn't know what he meant, and I am still not sure. He may have said this because I was against a constitutional amendment to authorize mandatory prayer in public schools and had been working on some things opposed by the 'religious right,' such as the Panama Canal treaties, a Department of Education, and the SALT II treaty with the Soviets.²

What happened in the four years between Smith's ringing endorsement of Carter and his condemnation of Carter as a secular humanist? At home and abroad, religious nationalism emerged as a force to reckon with. As Carter confronted religious nationalism in Israel, Iran, Afghanistan, and elsewhere, a highly organized, well-financed

¹ Daniel K. Williams, *God's Own Party: The Making of the Christian Right* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 125.

² Carter recounts this episode in several of his books: Jimmy Carter, *Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1996), 35; Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 32-33; Jimmy Carter, *White House Diary* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2010), 455.

religious nationalist movement, dominated by conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Christians, emerged as a major force in American electoral politics.³

Carter's election in 1976 raised high hopes among these conservative Christians, but he never met those expectations because he failed to promote their policy priorities. Although Carter shared a similar evangelical faith, he did not root his evangelicalism in specific political positions, especially on foreign policy issues such as increased military spending, unquestioning support of Israel, and an aggressive anticommunist foreign policy, issues that to Carter, did not seem to be related to evangelical Christianity at all.

By the 1980 presidential election, the emerging Christian Right supported Ronald Reagan, the Hollywood actor, divorcee, and irregular churchgoer, over Jimmy Carter, the Sunday School teacher from Plains, Georgia. The differences between what being an evangelical meant to Carter and to the Christian Right led these activists to oppose Carter's re-election and significantly diminished Carter's evangelical support in 1980. For the Christian Right, the deterioration of America's moral fiber in the 1960s and 1970s led them to seek candidates who promised to restore the nation's system of Judeo-Christian values and the military strength to spread those values, but Carter was unwilling

³ For histories of evangelicalism and fundamentalism, see George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co, 1991); George M. Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture: The Shaping of Twentieth-Century Evangelicalism, 1870-1925* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1980); Edward J. Larson, *Summer for the Gods: The Scopes Trial and America's Continuing Debate over Science and Religion* (New York: Basic Books, 1997); Joel Carpenter, *Revive Us Again: The Reawakening of American Fundamentalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997); and George M. Marsden, *Reforming Fundamentalism: Fuller Seminary and the New Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987). For more on the political activism of evangelicals and fundamentalists prior to the organization of the Christian Right, see Leo Ribuffo, *The Old Christian Right: The Protestant Far Right from the Great Depression to the Cold War*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1983); Lisa McGirr, *Suburban Warriors: The Origins of the New American Right*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), especially chapter 6; and Angela Lahr, *Millennial Dreams and Apocalyptic Nightmares: The Cold War Origins of Political Evangelicalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).

to use the power of the federal government to legislate morality in the way that the new religious activists wished.⁴

Furthermore, Carter's strong belief in the separation of church and state, a traditional Baptist position, compounded his problem with the nascent Christian Right because he failed to build relationships with them until it was too late. Historian Andrew Preston noted the irony that "part of Carter's problem was that he did not comprehend the religious mood of the country. In particular, he erred in trying too stringently to separate religion from politics."⁵ Much to the annoyance of members of the Christian Right, Carter consistently stressed his commitment to the separation of church and state to explain, for instance, that he personally opposed abortions but had to uphold the law of the land mandated by *Roe v. Wade*.⁶

While campaigning for the Democratic nomination in 1976, Carter sought to portray himself as a man of integrity opposed to politics as usual. His Christian faith shaped his campaign to restore competence and integrity in government.⁷ However, in his campaigning, perhaps Carter took the Apostle Paul's admonition to "become all things to

⁴ Although many of these voters adopted conservative ideas about reducing the role of the state in economic policy, one can classify them as religious nationalists because they embraced the notion of using the state's power to enforce their version of Christian values at home abroad. For more about the social and cultural changes of the 1960s and 1970s, see Maurice Isserman and Michael Kazin, *America Divided: The Civil War of the 1960s*, fourth edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011) and Bruce Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in American, Culture, Society, and Politics* (Cambridge: Da Capo Press, 2001).

⁵ Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith: Religion in American War and Diplomacy* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2012), 576.

⁶ *The Presidential Campaign 1976*, Volume One, Part Two (Washington DC: United States Government Printing Office, 1978), 979-980.

⁷ D. Jason Berggren, "I Had a Different Way of Governing: The Living Faith of President Carter," *Journal of Church and State* 47:1 (2005), 54-55. Berggren describes how Carter thought practicing politics as usual was sinful as he saw himself in a situation similar to when Jesus drove the moneychangers out of the temple.

all people” a bit too seriously.⁸ Carter used his faith to appeal to diverse audiences including southern white conservatives, blacks, and northern liberals, demonstrating the inclusiveness of his evangelicalism, a contrast to the more exclusive strands in evangelicalism and fundamentalism that would later comprise the Christian Right.⁹

Carter’s approach of appealing to different groups with his faith created high expectations, especially among rank-and-file white evangelicals who sought to elevate one of their own to the highest office of the land.¹⁰ In their hyperbolic expectations for Carter, Howard Norton and Bob Slosser wrote,

Jimmy Carter was one of the best things to happen to American evangelical Christianity in this century...In the months that he was in the national spotlight campaigning for the nomination, the secular press did more to spread the gospel—by factual reporting of the Carter campaign—than all the religious press combined. Cynical, hardened political reporters by the scores learned what it meant to be “saved” or “born again,” hardly standard-brand newspaper jargon.¹¹

These high expectations for a Carter administration contributed to the rising discontent of the Christian Right with its frustration over Carter not supporting their political stances or giving them special access to the White House.

Even before voters went to the polls in 1976, Carter had already begun to alienate some evangelical and fundamentalist voters with his decision to grant an interview to

⁸ 1 Corinthians 9:22 (New Revised Standard Version).

⁹ Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents: Billy Graham in the White House* (New York: Center Street, 2007), 246; William Martin, *With God on Our Side: The Rise of the Religious Right in America* (New York: Broadway Books, 1996), 157.

¹⁰ Leo P. Ribuffo, “God and Jimmy Carter,” in *Transforming Faith: The Sacred and Secular in Modern American History*, ed. M.L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert, (New York: Greenwood Press, 1989), 144. Ribuffo noted that while leaders were more hesitant about Carter, the rank-and-file embraced him and his family, perhaps as “an alternative attraction to Betty Ford’s candid feminism.”

¹¹ Howard Norton and Bob Slosser, *The Miracle of Jimmy Carter* (Plainfield: Logos International, 1976), 9-10.

Playboy magazine. Attempting to reassure secular audiences that he would not impose his beliefs on them, Carter discussed Jesus's teachings on humility and refraining from judgment in some rather candid terms:

I've looked on a lot of women with lust. I've committed adultery in my heart many times. This is something that God recognizes I will do—and I have done it—and God forgives me for it. But that doesn't mean that I condemn someone who not only looks on a woman with lust but who leaves his wife and shacks up with someone out of wedlock...Christ says, Don't consider yourself better than someone else because one guy screws a whole bunch of women while the other guy is loyal to his wife.¹²

Carter's *Playboy* interview set off a firestorm among the evangelical and fundamentalist voters hopeful for a born-again president. While most accepted his interpretation of the scriptures, they opposed his word choice. Bruce Edwards, Carter's pastor at Plains Baptist Church, admitted, "I do wish he had used different words."¹³ Bailey Smith, who had so enthusiastically endorsed Carter at the Southern Baptist Convention a few months prior, questioned whether he would even vote for Carter, stating, "We're totally against pornography...And well, 'screw' is just not a good Baptist word."¹⁴

Despite the fallout created by the *Playboy* interview among some evangelicals and fundamentalist voters, Carter won the presidential election with a slim majority of the popular and electoral vote. Although Ford won 51 percent of the evangelical vote, Carter's religious rhetoric and spiritual biography helped him reduce the margin of white

¹² Robert Scheer, "The *Playboy* Interview: Jimmy Carter," *Playboy*, November 1976, 63-86.

¹³ As cited in Randall Balmer, *God in the White House: How Faith Shaped the Presidency from John F. Kennedy to George W. Bush* (New York: HarperOne, 2008), 91.

¹⁴ Myra MacPherson, "Evangelicals Seen Cooling on Carter," *Washington Post*, September 27, 1976.

evangelical votes traditionally received by Republican candidates. Carter carried the Southern Baptist vote and the white Baptist vote nationwide by a margin of 56-43.¹⁵

During the transition period and in the first several years of his administration, Carter made few efforts to improve or maintain a relationship with the evangelical community. Phil Strickland, an official with the Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission, had advised the Carter campaign on religious matters and formulated a plan to continue religious outreach. In a memo penned during the transition period, Strickland tried to assuage Carter's fear about breaching the separation of church and state, arguing, "using the church to get elected and utilizing the structures of religion to advance administration programs which are conceived to advance social justice and meet human need are altogether different." He advised Carter to appoint a White House liaison to the religious community, someone "religious enough to understand religious mind-sets and political enough to understand issues."¹⁶

Carter ignored Strickland's advice, and instead established a broader Office of Public Liaison as part of the White House structure with Midge Costanza, a women's and gay rights activist, as its first director. While Costanza had success in outreach to liberal

¹⁵ Laura Kalman, *Right Star Rising: A New Politics, 1974-1980* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2010), 255; Williams, *God's Own Party*, 132.

¹⁶ Memo, Phil Strickland to Jimmy Carter, "Administration's relationship to religious community," December 3, 1976, "Christian Life Commission 2/16/77-9/23/77" folder, Box 91, Office of Chief of Staff—Landon Butler Subject File, JCL; Letter, Jimmy Carter to Phil Strickland, December 17, 1976, "Christian Life Commission 2/16/77-9/23/77" folder, Box 91, Office of Chief of Staff—Landon Butler Subject File, JCL.

activist groups, her activism on behalf of women and homosexuals alienated some religious groups, especially evangelical and fundamentalist groups.¹⁷

Evangelicals had high hopes for Carter's potential accomplishments, expecting greater access to the White House and a larger share of presidential appointments. Their high expectations diminished as Carter declined speaking invitations to the National Religious Broadcasters annual meeting in Washington DC and ignored a list of hundreds of evangelicals qualified to serve in government compiled by Pat Robertson (who supported Carter in 1976).¹⁸ In fact, some of Carter's appointments like Costanza's offended many evangelical supporters. Carter administration officials consistently ignored requests for meetings with evangelical groups in its first two years because they took evangelicals for granted and dismissed many of their firmly held political convictions. They believed the president's character and testimony would maintain evangelical support while the president focused his religious outreach on Catholics and Jews (groups still wary of Carter's religious beliefs).¹⁹

While the Carter administration largely ignored the evangelical and fundamentalist community for its first two years, New Right political operatives busily built an umbrella of organizations to mobilize evangelicals and fundamentalists to

¹⁷ Memo, Phil Strickland to Midge Costanza and Chip Carter, "Meetings with Religious Leaders," March 21, 1977, "Christian Life Commission 2/16/77-9/23/77" folder, Box 91, Office of Chief of Staff—Landon Butler Subject File, JCL; Michael D. Hammond, "Twice Born, Once Elected: The Making of the Religious Right during the Carter Administration" (PhD dissertation, University of Arkansas, 2009), 46.

¹⁸ Frye Galliard, *Prophet from Plains: Jimmy Carter and His Legacy* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2007), 91; Williams, *God's Own Party*, 180.

¹⁹ J. Brooks Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 118-119; Hammond, "Twice Born, Once Elected," 47, 49-50.

support politically conservative candidates and causes.²⁰ The IRS decision to threaten the tax exemptions of racially discriminatory religious schools provided New Right activists a cause that could effectively mobilize rank-and-file conservative Christians. Christian schools advocate Robert Billings observed that the August 1978 IRS decision had “done more to bring Christians together than any man since the Apostle Paul.”²¹

Prior to the schools controversy, conservative Christians offered practically no organized opposition to the Panama Canal treaties, an issue they would frequently mention in their attacks on Carter later in the 1980 campaign. Early in his administration, Carter focused on negotiating a treaty to turn control of the canal over to Panama to protect long-term American interests in the region, a goal pursued since the Johnson administration. Ultimately, Carter and Panamanian President Omar Torrijos signed two treaties: one turning the Canal over to Panama after 1999 and another permanently guaranteeing that the United States could defend the neutrality of the Canal. However, Carter’s faith also played a role in making the treaties a priority; he later used the Panama Canal Treaties as an example to illustrate the Niebuhrian concept of justice as the highest aspiration of society to a class of divinity students at Emory.²²

²⁰ For more on the emergence of the modern conservative movement, see Donald Critchlow, *The Conservative Ascendancy: How the GOP Right Made Political History* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Jonathan Schoenwald, *A Time for Choosing: The Rise of Modern American Conservatism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); George H. Nash, *The Conservative Intellectual Movement in America since 1945*, thirtieth anniversary edition (Wilmington: Intercollegiate Studies Institute Books, 2006); Dan T. Carter, *The Politics of Rage: George Wallace, the Origins of the New Conservatism, and the Transformation of American Politics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995); and Donald Critchlow, *Phyllis Schlafly and Grassroots Conservatism: A Woman’s Crusade* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

²¹ As cited in Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 164.

²² Peter Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 382; For a contemporaneous account of the Panama debate, see Walter LaFeber, *The Panama Canal: The Crisis in Historical Perspective* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978).

Despite the lack of organized opposition, individual pastors, laypersons, and denominations voiced their opinions of the treaties. Within Carter's own Southern Baptist Convention, considerable disagreement existed over the treaties. SBC President Jimmy Allen supported ratification along with many Baptist missionaries who believed that the treaties would help them in their evangelistic efforts.²³ Other Southern Baptist laypersons opposed the treaties for fear of advancing communism in Panama and protested certain Baptist periodicals who reported on the support some Baptist officials offered for ratification without registering the views of opponents.²⁴

To make matters worse, Carter made no substantive attempt to court evangelical support for the treaties outside of the Southern Baptists and two representatives from the National Association of Evangelicals. Instead, he and his staff briefed numerous religious leaders from the Catholic Church, mainline Protestant denominations, and various Jewish organizations. This slight exacerbated evangelicals' frustration with their lack of access to the White House.²⁵

²³ "So. Bapt. Convention President Endorses Panama Canal Treaty," *The Word and the Way*, September 29, 1977, 4; "Allen Sees Canal as Exploitation Symbol," *Biblical Recorder*, October 8, 1977; "Two Baptist missionaries endorse proposed Panama Canal treaties," *Baptist and Reflector*, January 26, 1978, 6; Weston W. Ware, "Letter to the Editor," *The Christian Index*, December 1, 1977, 7.

²⁴ Don Morton, "Shocked That Allen Tricked," *Baptist Digest*, November 28, 1977, 8; John E. Davis, "Canal Treaty Not Favored," *Baptist Digest*, February 27, 1978; Charles W. Engel, "Two Wrong on Canal Issue," *Baptist Digest*, February 27, 1978; H.M. Eggers, "Unbalanced reporting," *Baptist and Reflector*, March 2, 1978, 9.

²⁵ Memo, Phil Strickland to Landon Butler, "Participants in White House Briefing on Panama," n.d., "Canal: Religious Groups [n.d.] [O/A 5153]" folder, Box 17, Records of Joseph Aragon—Records Relating to Panama Canal, JCL; Memo, "Briefing on the Panama Canal Treaties for Leaders of Religious Organizations," 1/30/78, "Panama Canal Treaties 1977 [CF, O/A 413] [3]" folder, Box 50, Office of the Chief of Staff Records—Hamilton Jordan Subject Files, JCL.

In essence, while the more secular New Right lost the battle over the Canal treaties, they discovered that winning the larger war would require additional troops that the unorganized conservative Christian constituency could provide.²⁶ New Right operative Richard Viguerie confirmed that assessment, “Because of Panama we are better organized. We developed a great deal of confidence in ourselves, and our opponents became weaker.”²⁷

To recruit these frustrated Christians, New Right political operatives Paul Weyrich (Eastern Rite Catholic), Howard Phillips (Orthodox Jew), and Viguerie (Roman Catholic) needed someone to appeal to rank-and-file white evangelicals and fundamentalists.²⁸ The New Right operatives found the perfect candidates in Southern Baptist laymen and former Colgate-Palmolive sales manager Ed McAteer and Christian schools activist Robert Billings, both of whom played critical roles in linking Weyrich and company with politically conservative evangelical and fundamentalist pastors. Weyrich, Phillips, Viguerie, and their new allies McAteer and Billings successfully coordinated the formation of a trio of Christian Right organizations over the course of 1979: Christian Voice, Moral Majority, and Religious Roundtable.²⁹

²⁶ For the best history of the New Right and the Panama Canal Treaties, see Adam Clymer, *Drawing the Line at the Big Ditch: The Panama Canal Treaties and the Rise of the Right* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2008); James Robert Hinkson, “Of Gog and Naboth: The Christian Response to the Panama Canal Treaties of 1977” (MA thesis, University of North Carolina at Wilmington, 2006), 46.

²⁷ As cited in Pfeffer, “The Drill: The Emergence of the New Right as a Political Force in US Conservative Politics during the Panama Canal Debates, 1977-1978” (MA thesis, North Carolina State University, 2006), 64.

²⁸ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 171.

²⁹ Clendinen, “Christian New Right’s Rush to Power,” *New York Times*, August 18, 1980.

In addition to the formation of these new Christian Right organizations, the conservative takeover of the Southern Baptist Convention further facilitated evangelical laypersons embracing the causes of the New Right despite the denomination's traditional commitment to the separation of church and state. Although driven primarily by theological concerns such as biblical inerrancy, the SBC takeover had a number of explicitly political consequences for the nation's largest denomination. McAteer, a member at Bellevue Baptist Church, would influence his pastor Adrian Rogers, the newly elected SBC president, as he became more active in political affairs during his term as convention president. At the 1979 convention, Charles Stanley, pastor of Atlanta's First Baptist Church, warned that "we are about to lose our republic" due to liberalism in the churches and the tendencies toward communism and socialism in the federal government and in the larger American culture.³⁰

While the religious schools issue provided the major unifying force for the Christian Right, these new organizations espoused a variety of conservative political positions. Unsurprisingly, the Christian Right took strong stands on domestic issues such as abortion, gay rights, and the Equal Rights Amendment, but it also consistently took conservative stances on foreign policy issues that seemingly had no apparent religious or moral content. To conservative Christians, foreign policy issues such as SALT II and the B1 bomber had moral implications like social issues while domestic social issues such as prayer in schools and gay rights seemingly had global implications.

Christian Right activists even opposed Carter's human rights policy, the cornerstone of the president's foreign policy agenda, because they believed it was

³⁰ Jim Newton and Charlie Warren, "Pastors Urged to Purge Liberals," *Baptist Press*, June 12, 1979.

“evidence of his being motivated by a deep-seated secular humanism rather than the guiding Christian faith and principles by which he lived.”³¹ To Christian Right leaders, secular humanism was an ideological springboard to socialism and communism because it denied God’s place in the order of society. Although present in the foreign policy thought of conservative Christian circles since the Russian Revolution, anticommunism was the key element defining the Christian Right’s stances on contemporary foreign policy issues including the Panama Canal Treaties, SALT II, the B1 bomber, and normalization of relations with the People’s Republic of China.³²

For instance, the Carter administration’s support of majority rule in Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) created indignation among many Christian Right activists who feared that the black majority would turn the country over to the communists.³³ Some Christian Right leaders such as Falwell had once promoted policies of segregation in the South and denounced the civil rights movement, so their opposition contained traces of racial as well as anticommunist feelings.³⁴ As part of a larger campaign to promote issues of morality, Christian Voice used religious broadcasting to advocate for their foreign policy

³¹ Ariail and Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter’s Apprentice*, 42.

³² See Paul Boyer, *When Time Shall Be No More: Prophecy Belief in Modern American Culture* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1992), especially chapter five.

³³ For more discussion of Carter’s Rhodesian policy, see Gaddis Smith, *Morality, Reason, & Power* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1986), 133-147; Scott Kaufman, *Plans Unraveled: The Foreign Policy of the Carter Administration* (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2008), 59-67, 189-192; Nancy Mitchell, “Terrorists or freedom fighters? Jimmy Carter and Rhodesia,” in *Cold War in Southern Africa: White Power, Black Liberation*, ed. Sue Onslow, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 177-200.

³⁴ In 1965, Falwell preached a sermon entitled “Ministers and Marchers” that criticized church leaders involved in the civil rights protests of the time rather than in preaching the gospel. Falwell later renounced the sermon as “false prophecy,” adding that “this idea of ‘religion and politics don’t mix’ was invented by the devil to keep Christians from running their own country.” As cited in Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 174-175 and Darren Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt: Plain-Folk Religion, Grassroots Politics, and the Rise of Evangelical Conservatism* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2011), 405.

concerns and to urge Carter to lift sanctions against the government of Prime Minister Ian Smith and oppose majority rule.³⁵ One Christian Right activist decried Carter's decision to back the black Robert Mugabe, "a man with a Marxist philosophy" instead of the white Smith, whom he described as "a Godly man."³⁶

Many conservative Christians saw the advance of communism not just abroad in places like Rhodesia but also in Carter's lack of action on domestic moral issues such as abortion and ERA. The issue of gay rights was especially disconcerting to conservative Christians because of the perceived links between homosexuality and susceptibility to communist persuasion. Thus, a person's bedroom behavior became a matter of national security.³⁷

These Christians believed that Carter's unwillingness to make Christianity a centerpiece of national discourse and pride again weakened the nation and gave the Soviets the advantage in the Cold War. Kim Wickes warned that "if we continue retreating from the Communists, God will have to apologize to Sodom and Gomorrah if He does not chastise us Americans for turning away from Him and hearing the anti-God forces."³⁸ Samuel Collins lamented that, "the doors of our public schools were closed to

³⁵ Marjorie Hyer, "Conservatives Set Lobby with a Religious Base," *Washington Post*, June 15, 1979.

³⁶ Letter, J.D. Diehl to Ronald Reagan, September 22, 1980, "Voter Groups- Religious Correspondence (15/17)" folder, Box 343, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

³⁷ Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2001), 67. Dean explains the link as such: "Homosexuals were depicted as 'moral weaklings,' vulnerable to both the blandishments and to the blackmail of communist agents because of their 'softness,' their 'instability,' and their inability to deny themselves the pleasures of their 'perverted' sexuality." See also David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006) and K.A. Cuordileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

³⁸ Letter, Kim Wickes to Robert Maddox, October 18, 1979, "Correspondence File 11/1-11/21/79" folder, Box 99, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

prayer but remained open to the atheism of communism.”³⁹ In a creative form of criticizing Carter’s domestic and foreign policy agendas and expressing the fear of communist encroachment, James Grice wrote “A Poetrail of Washington DC”:

Where the masters of politics congregate
A perfect illusion to decide our fate
Surely there is our endless sorrow
Heaven can only change our tomorrow
In the beginning this they wouldn’t allow
Nothing can change their authority now
God gave us Jesus and the power of unity
To bring goodwill in every community
Our hearts are cold and the good is hid
No use to deny it we have all backslid

Demons rule instead of God’s power
Communism grows closer by the hour⁴⁰

In addition to their strident anticommunism, Christian Right activists were very interested in US policy in the Middle East, especially regarding the holy land of Israel. During his 1976 campaign, Carter told Christian broadcaster Pat Robertson in an interview that the creation of Israel in 1948 was part of “biblical prophecy.”⁴¹ His statement assured many evangelicals and fundamentalists that Carter would support Israel unconditionally, but historian Leo Ribuffo later commented that his response on the *700 Club* was “atypical” and that Carter possessed “virtually no interest” in dispensational premillennialism, a doctrine common in many fundamentalist churches.⁴²

³⁹ Samuel W. Collins, “My Views on Why Prayer Should Be Restored in Our Public Schools,” n.d., “RM 2 1/20/77-1/20/81” folder, Box RM-1, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

□ James Grice, “A Poetrail of Washington DC,” n.d., “Correspondence File 8/16-8/20/80” folder, Box 100, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

□ As cited in Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right*, 96.

□ Ribuffo, “God and Jimmy Carter,” 148.

Meanwhile, the new Likud government in Israel led by Prime Minister Menachem Begin sought to actively woo the leaders of the nascent Christian Right. Based on a dispensational premillennial interpretation of scriptures, many evangelical and fundamentalist Christians endorsed Israeli territorial expansion until it encompassed its biblical boundaries, a goal shared by Begin and his religious nationalist supporters. The Christian Right supported Israel as not only a bulwark against communism in the Middle East, but also the harbinger of the millennium and the corresponding tribulation and rapture. Falwell, the most prolific Christian Zionist courted by Begin, later remarked that the modern state of Israel was “the single greatest sign indicating the imminent return of Jesus Christ” and that “since the Ascension of the Lord Jesus Christ to the right hand of His Father nearly two thousand years ago, the most important date we should remember is May 14, 1948” (the founding date of Israel).⁴³

In April 1978, Falwell received an invitation to visit both Israel and Egypt and meet with both Begin and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat. After his meetings with Begin and Sadat, Falwell sent a trip report to the Carter administration describing both leaders as still ready to negotiate for peace, but administration officials ignored the report, which further fueled the animosity between Falwell and Carter.⁴⁴

As the major organizations of the Christian Right took shape in the summer of 1979 around a host of domestic and foreign policy issues, the Carter administration

□ Jerry Falwell, “The Twenty-first Century and the End of the World,” *Fundamentalist Journal*, May 1988, 10.

□ “Falwell, Religious Leaders Confer With Sadat, Begin,” *Journal Champion*, May 12, 1978; Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right*, 195; Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 404.

renewed its interest in religious outreach after two years of relative inactivity. Robert Maddox, who had crossed paths with Carter numerous times in Georgia Baptist circles, had aspired to become part of the White House staff and work as a liaison between the administration and religious groups. In fact, he wrote Carter on several occasions expressing his desire to join the White House staff.⁴⁵

Jody Powell, Carter's press secretary, encouraged Maddox's ambition to join the administration when he requested that Maddox write a draft for a speech Carter was going to deliver for the SBC Brotherhood Commission. No one on Carter's staff knew how to connect with the religious community, so they sought Maddox out to do some freelance speechwriting for this particular audience.⁴⁶ Maddox began contacting fellow Southern Baptists in preparation for the speech and discovered many angry at their lack of access to the Carter White House. His desire to work for Carter was even more intense now because he felt "if [Carter] was in trouble with Southern Baptist leaders, what would he be with others?"⁴⁷

White House Communications Director Gerald Rafshoon later contacted Maddox about coming to Washington as a full-time speechwriter after he had contributed some suggestions to Carter's speech at the ceremony for the signing of the Israeli-Egyptian peace treaties.⁴⁸ Even though he was hired as a speechwriter, news of Maddox's

□ Letter, Robert Maddox to Jimmy Carter, September 1, 1978, "RM 1/20/77-12/31/78" folder, Box RM-1, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

□ Hammond, "Twice Born, Once Elected," 53-54.

□ Robert Maddox Exit Interview Transcript, December 8, 1980, 7, □ HYPERLINK "<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exitInt/Maddox.pdf>"
<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exitInt/Maddox.pdf>

⁴⁸ Robert Maddox Exit Interview Transcript, December 8, 1980, 8,

appointment created a stir in the religious community as clergy from all sorts of denominations began seeking access to the White House through Maddox.⁴⁹

Following the staff and Cabinet shakeup after the “malaise” speech, Maddox transferred from the Speechwriters’ Office to the Office of Public Liaison where he served as the Carter administration’s religious liaison. In fleshing out his new job description, Maddox proposed that he would travel the country to hear the concerns of the religious community, participate in religious meetings, and establish contacts with conservative Christian leaders and groups.⁵⁰

Despite the general lack of enthusiasm among the White House staff for religious outreach, Maddox dedicated himself to improving Carter’s standing with the religious community, especially among conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Christians. Maddox anticipated the challenge Carter would face in the upcoming presidential election from them, noting, “[Carter’s] ‘born-again’ faith raises their expectations and makes him more vulnerable to their charges of inconsistency if he does not lift up selected issues.”⁵¹

Maddox pushed hard to schedule a meeting between Carter and conservative religious leaders, such as Falwell, Stanley, McAteer, Billings, Rogers, and Robison. Maddox strongly believed in Carter’s ability to win these leaders over with his

<http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exitInt/Maddox.pdf>

⁴⁹ Robert L. Maddox, *Preacher at the White House* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1984), 136.

⁵⁰ Memo, Robert Maddox to Jerry Rafshoon and Greg Schneiders, “Religious Liaison,” July 27, 1979, “Correspondence File 8/1-8/14/79” folder, Box 98, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

⁵¹ Memo, Robert Maddox to Jody Powell, “Religious Aspects of the Campaign,” n.d., “Correspondence n.d.” folder, Box 98, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

personality and Christian testimony.⁵² However, this proposed meeting would not occur until January 1980 due to Carter's scheduling conflicts and the lack of emphasis on religious outreach among other administration officials who believed Carter's time should be focused on other groups because they felt his personal faith was sufficient to maintain evangelical support.⁵³ Even if Maddox had succeeded in scheduling this meeting earlier, it probably would not have been successful because the relationship between Carter and the Christian Right had already soured so much and conservative Republicans had preemptively courted their support.

Early in his tenure as religious liaison, Maddox also sought to cultivate a relationship between the Carter administration and Billy Graham. The famous preacher had counseled presidents since Harry Truman, but felt particularly betrayed by Richard Nixon's Watergate scandal because he was closer to Nixon than any previous president.⁵⁴ In his earlier years, Carter had organized a Graham video crusade in Americus, Georgia and had served as honorary chairman of a crusade in Atlanta while he was governor. However, Carter and Graham remained distant, in part stemming from the 1976 campaign when both Graham's organization and the Carter campaign exchanged some sharp remarks about one another.⁵⁵ Journalists Nancy Gibbs and Michael Duffy

⁵² Memo, Bob Maddox to Phil Wise and Anne Wexler, "Meeting with Ad Hoc Group of Conservative Religious Leaders," August 28, 1979, "RM 1/20/77-1/20/81" folder, Box RM-1, WHCF—Subject File, JCL.

⁵³ Maddox, *Preacher at the White House*, 136-137.

⁵⁴ For Graham's relationship with the various presidents, see Billy Graham, *Just As I Am: The Autobiography of Billy Graham* (New York: HarperCollins, 1997) and Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*.

⁵⁵ Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*, 249, 251.

speculated that “Carter was so thoroughly grounded in conventional church life that he hardly needed a drop-in presidential pastor like Graham.”⁵⁶

Prior to Maddox’s work, Carter’s team sought the popular evangelist’s endorsement of SALT II, an arms limitation treaty that provoked the ire of many Christian Right activists who perceived it as a display of weakness to the Soviets. One activist accused Carter of continuing Ford and Kissinger’s game of “playing footsie with the communists in Russia and China” in direct violation of Paul’s admonition to the Corinthian church to “not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.”⁵⁷ In a letter to the editor to the *Daily Press* in Newport News forwarded to Maddox’s office, a writer called the Democrats “sin sick” for their support of SALT II “because SALT I made us weak and SALT [II], will help to give this country to God’s enemy. The Communist[s] are for SALT II, why????? God wants you free, but the communist does not believe in freedom.”⁵⁸

Graham seemed more amicable toward the treaty than most of his Christian Right counterparts, explaining, “as a Christian I am committed to peace. I am also committed to disarmament,” but he added the following caveat, “unless it involves unilateral

⁵⁶ Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*, 247-248.

⁵⁷ Letter, Charles Gossard to Bob Maddox, September 30, 1980, “Correspondence File 9/27-9/30/80” folder, Box 101, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL. The Scriptural passage cited in the letter was 2 Corinthians 6: 14-16 which reads, “Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: ‘I will dwell in them, And walk among them. I will be their God, And they shall be My people.’” (NKJV)

⁵⁸ Letter, Eugene Wilson Sr. to Editor of *Daily Press* in Newport News, n.d., “Gay Issues” folder, Box 105, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

disarmament.”⁵⁹ Outgoing SBC president Allen urged the administration to get a stronger endorsement from Graham, which would carry considerable weight with many evangelicals. In 1978, the SBC had passed a resolution supporting the treaty, but Allen warned the Carter administration passing another resolution at the next annual meeting would be difficult due to the growing strength of conservatives angling for more power and influence in the denomination.⁶⁰

Maddox traveled to the Grahams’ home in Montreat, North Carolina to meet with the respected evangelist and request his support for the president’s agenda. He particularly wanted to convince Graham to issue a more specific endorsement for SALT II that went beyond his earlier general statements about nuclear arms control. Maddox’s entreaty to Graham was part of a larger strategy to involve evangelical leaders in the SALT II ratification debate to make up the mistake of ignoring them during the Panama Canal treaties debate, but the approach proved too little, too late as the Christian Right steadfastly opposed the treaty.⁶¹ In his report to the Carters on his trip to Montreat, Maddox stated that Graham “would especially welcome private time with [Carter] for conversation. [However] Dr. Graham does not care to be a highly visible figure at the White House.”⁶²

⁵⁹ Letter, Billy Graham to Landon Butler, March 14, 1979, “SALT II and Soviet Brigade in Cuba 3/14/79-10/23/79” folder, Box 131, Office of Chief of Staff, JCL.

⁶⁰ Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right*, 215.

⁶¹ Statement by Billy Graham for the Convocation on Southern Baptist Resolution Number Five, Peacemaking and Arms Control, February 16, 1979, “SALT II and Soviet Brigade in Cuba 3/14/79-10/23/79” folder, Box 131, Office of Chief of Staff, JCL; Memo, Bob Maddox to Anne Wexler, “SALT Plan for Churches,” October 11, 1979, “Correspondence File 10/79” folder, Box 98, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

⁶² Memo, Bob Maddox to Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, “Meeting with Billy Graham,” September 5, 1979, “Billy Graham” folder, WHCF—Name File, JCL.

Despite Maddox's entreaty to the famous evangelist on behalf of the president, Graham called a private meeting of a dozen or so prominent ministers at an airport hotel in Dallas in the fall of 1979. These leaders discussed the moral problems of the country and prayed for America's future. Echoing concerns of retired senior military leaders worried about growing Soviet military spending compared to declining American military spending, Graham expressed fears that the United States only had a thousand days of freedom left if no major changes occurred. The leaders agreed that Reagan seemed like a more promising leader than Carter, but they decided they needed to confirm the depth of his convictions. Despite his role in organizing this *ad hoc* meeting, Graham stressed to the other participants that he could not play a public role in this venture due to the residual damage from his close relationship with Nixon, but he eventually privately supported Reagan.⁶³

The 1980 election was significant not only for the role of evangelical and fundamentalist Christian voters in the general election, but also in their role in the selection of the Republican Party nominee during the primaries.⁶⁴ As Christian Right organizations such as Moral Majority and Religious Roundtable formed in mid-1979, they searched for a candidate in the Republican Party to champion their values in the coming presidential election. During a meeting with former Texas governor John Connally, James Kennedy, pastor of the conservative Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in

⁶³ Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*, 260-261. Prior to the general election, Graham offered his private support to Reagan "short of [a] public endorsement." Memo, Paul Laxalt to Chuck Tyson, September 12, 1980, "Political Ops- Voter Groups- Christians/Evangelicals (1/4) (Timmons)" folder, Box 255, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

⁶⁴ Williams, *God's Own Party*, 188.

Fort Lauderdale, Florida, asked, “If you were to die tomorrow, Governor, and you wanted to go to heaven, what reason would you give God for letting you in?” Connally responded, “Well, my mother was a Methodist, my pappy was a Methodist, my grandmother was a Methodist, and I’d just tell him I ain’t any worse than any of the other people that want to get into heaven.” In contrast, at a similar private meeting, Reagan responded to the same question, “I wouldn’t give God any reason for letting me in. I’d just ask for mercy, because of what Jesus did for me at Calvary.”⁶⁵

Reagan rarely addressed religion during his campaign for the Republican nomination in 1976. Although Reagan had contributed his voice to narrating anti-Communist filmstrips for evangelicals and fundamentalists including Billy James Hargis and the Church League of America, *Christianity Today* lamented that Reagan seldom discussed his faith in public. In fact, Reagan only spoke about his faith in the 1976 campaign with talk show host George Otis on a Christian television broadcast.⁶⁶

In the eyes of some prominent evangelicals, Reagan did not just rarely speak of his faith, but he also did not even know the language of evangelicalism. Charles Colson (a Watergate co-conspirator turned evangelical Christian) recalled that in response to a reporter’s question whether he was born-again, “Reagan shrugged, like the fellow had landed from Mars. He didn’t know what he meant.”⁶⁷

⁶⁵ As cited in Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 209. Martin relied on Arizona Congressman and Christian Right supporter John Conlan for a firsthand account of this meeting.

⁶⁶ Michael Lienesch, *Redeeming America: Piety & Politics in the New Christian Right* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1993), 6, 211; Andrew Hogue, “1980: Reagan, Carter, and the Politics of Religion in America” (PhD dissertation, Baylor University, 2009), 151-152.

⁶⁷ As cited in Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 208. The question was prompted by the recent publication of Colson’s book *Born Again* and the growing interest in evangelicalism prompted by Carter, Colson, and others.

In a total about face from that 1976 campaign, Reagan powerfully used the language of faith to entice Christian supporters in his 1980 campaign. His eloquent response about his personal faith eased many doubts about Reagan's Christian bona fides among the evangelical and fundamentalist Christian leaders present at that private meeting during the Republican primaries.⁶⁸

Convinced of Reagan's Christian faith, his anti-communist and anti-big government values, and his leadership abilities, the Christian Right actively campaigned for him during the Republican primaries. Christian Voice established Christians for Reagan, a political action committee to raise funds and to campaign on behalf of Reagan's candidacy. The group launched a media blitz during the March primaries focused on promoting Reagan's spiritual life through direct mail, radio and television ads, and transcripts of Reagan's 1976 interview with George Otis.⁶⁹ In Alaska, the state chapter of the Moral Majority essentially took over the state Republican Party through its caucuses and state convention to support Reagan's bid for the GOP nomination.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ One of the more interesting questions scholars of Reagan debate is where does belief end and rhetoric begin for a president who made such strong professions of faith, but rarely ever attended church. Much of the work to date on Reagan and his faith is hagiographic. For instance, Paul Kengor's chapter discussing Reagan's 1976 and 1980 presidential campaigns does not really address his increased use of religious language in 1980 and instead draws mainly on Reagan quotes about the atheistic nature of communism from the 1976 election. See Paul Kengor, *God and Ronald Reagan: A Spiritual Life* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 139-155. While his work is certainly favorable to Reagan, it is a scholarly starting point for a discussion of Reagan's faith rather than just being a devotional book. For a more hagiographical work on Reagan's faith, see Mary Beth Brown, *Hand of Providence: The Strong and Quiet Faith of Ronald Reagan* (Nashville: Nelson Current, 2004).

⁶⁹ Russell Chandler, "Christian Voice Political Action Group Plains Massive Drive on Reagan's Behalf," *Los Angeles Times*, March 6, 1980; Dochuk, *From Bible Belt to Sunbelt*, 388.

⁷⁰ Wallace Turner, "Group of Evangelical Protestants Takes Over the GOP in Alaska," *New York Times*, June 9, 1980.

A series of foreign policy crises in late 1979 further solidified the Christian Right's support of Reagan and its opposition to Carter, whom many activists viewed as weak and unwilling to assert American power. The belated discovery of a Soviet combat brigade in Cuba in mid-September 1979 was one incident that ignited Christian paranoia about the creeping advance of Communism and fears about Carter's seemingly indecisive response to this perceived Communist advance. Left behind after the conclusion of the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962 to prevent an American invasion, this Soviet brigade had never really attracted much attention from the United States because of its limited strategic importance. However, in the context of Cuban-led adventures in Africa and contentious SALT II negotiations, the public exposure of the brigade set off a minor crisis.⁷¹

One concerned Christian wrote Maddox in the wake of the Soviet brigade in Cuba crisis that "Christians are God's human instruments; communists are Satan's human instruments," warning Maddox and the Carter administration that Christian America must seek peace through strength in dealing with the Soviet Union and Cuba.⁷² Writing in reaction to the same crisis, Ezra Taft Benson of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints criticized Carter for refusing "to invoke the great Monroe Doctrine" and "permitting the Godless Communist encirclement of our country."⁷³

⁷¹ Robert Strong, *Working in the World: Jimmy Carter and the Making of American Foreign Policy* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2000), 208-209.

⁷² Kim Wickes to Robert Maddox, October 18, 1979, Folder "Correspondence File 11/1-11/21/79," Box 99, Robert Maddox Series, Records of Anne Wexler, JCL.

⁷³ Ezra Taft Benson to Jimmy Carter, January 29, 1980, Folder "Correspondence File 1/80," Box 99, Robert Maddox Series, Records of Anne Wexler, JCL.

The Christian Right also heavily criticized Carter for his response to the Iranian revolution and the subsequent hostage crisis, condemning his measured approach to the developing situation and urging him to retaliate. Many urged Carter to strike back at Iran, one even claiming that “excessive passiveness invites aggression, even the greatest pacifist of all time, our Lord Jesus Christ, showed us that line must be drawn at some point when he physically disbursed [sic] the merchants from the Temple.”⁷⁴ Some saw the emergence of the fundamentalist Islamic government in Iran as a sign of the end times in which Khomeini’s Iran would ally with the Soviets to attack Israel, conveniently ignoring the Islamic opposition to Soviet communism, especially after the invasion of Afghanistan.⁷⁵ Others saw the hostage crisis as just the latest consequence of America’s moral degradation, linking the Iranian situation to debates about social issues such as gay rights.⁷⁶

As the Christian Right lined up behind Reagan’s campaign and a series of international crises occurred at the end of 1979, Carter pursued the most significant outreach campaign to evangelical and fundamentalist leaders since his presidency began. At the advice of Maddox, Carter accepted an invitation to speak at the National Religious Broadcasters (NRB) annual convention. In his speech to the NRB, Carter initially kept his remarks light, “I have been very excited ever since I accepted the invitation to come here to have a chance to meet all you famous people.” He further joked, “I decided on the

⁷⁴ Bruce Hinkle to Robert Maddox, n.d. Folder “Correspondence n.d.” Box 98, Robert Maddox Series, Records of Anne Wexler, JCL.

⁷⁵ Weber, *On the Road to Armageddon: How Evangelicals Became Israel’s Best Friend* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 207-208.

⁷⁶ Fletcher Brothers to Jimmy Carter, August 7, 1980, Folder “Gay Issues,” Box 105, Robert Maddox Series, Records of Anne Wexler, JCL.

way over here that I'm going to turn over to you one of the tremendous responsibilities that I had in 1976. This year I'm going to let you spend your full time explaining what it means to be born again." Even though it did not seem that way at the time, his joke was ironic because of the disparity of definitions held by Carter and the more conservative pastors. Later, as the speech turned more serious, Carter warned the audience of how religious faith "can be distorted into terrible acts," invoking the ongoing Iranian hostage crisis and turmoil of Khomeini's Islamic revolution.⁷⁷ However, the Christian Right leaders present did not see a similar potential in their own fusion of religion and politics.

In evaluating the president's address, Maddox offered Carter nothing but praise, citing the speech as being "exactly on target" and the reception as "universally appreciative." Playing up the advantages of the religious campaign strategy that he strongly advocated, Maddox noted that the speech would be broadcast on Rex Humbard's television program and on other programs on religious networks.⁷⁸

However, Carter's speech proved too little, too late as he largely ignored the evangelical and fundamentalist community in the first two years of his administration. With hindsight, Maddox wrote in his memoirs that Carter might have received an even stronger reception had he spoken to the NRB a year earlier. As it was, Carter's 1980 NRB speech received skepticism among some of those in attendance because it seemed to them "more political and less presidential."⁷⁹

⁷⁷ Jimmy Carter, "National Religious Broadcasters Remarks at the Association's Annual Convention," January 21, 1980, in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. Santa Barbara, CA. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=32335>.

⁷⁸ Memo, Robert Maddox to Anne Wexler, "Weekly Report," January 25, 1980, "Correspondence File 1/80" folder, Box 99, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

⁷⁹ Maddox, *Preacher at the White House*, 162.

Maddox also finally succeeded in scheduling the long-awaited private meeting between Carter and conservative evangelical and fundamentalist leaders. Since the NRB convention was in Washington DC, Maddox invited fourteen of the more prominent ministers attending the convention to a private breakfast with the president.⁸⁰

To make the meeting run more smoothly, Maddox worked with these ministers to formulate a list of questions in advance with topics including abortion, FCC regulations of Christian broadcasting, and national defense. The first question, asked by James Kennedy, pastor of Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Florida, concerned national defense:

Mr. President, we are worried about our state of military preparedness. From many retired generals and admirals we have heard how terribly vulnerable the United States is to Soviet attack both in terms of military capability and civil defense. Would you tell us about our national defense capability? Would you also address yourself to your personal and our national will to strike if necessary?⁸¹

The question on national defense that began the breakfast meeting indicated the importance of foreign and defense policy issues to Christian conservatives. Although there was not the same direct connection with moral issues, the threat of communist triumph and resulting persecution made national defense and foreign policy key concerns in the minds of these evangelical leaders. Only scheduled to stay twenty minutes, Carter

⁸⁰ The guest list included Jimmy Allen, Jim Bakker, Robert Dugan, Jerry Falwell, Brandt Gustavson, Rex Humbard, Howard Jones, James Kennedy, Tim LaHaye, Oral Roberts, Demos Shakarian, Morris Sheats, Ronald Sider, and Charles Stanley. "Guests at the Evangelical Leaders Breakfast," January 22, 1980, "National Religious Broadcasters Breakfast" folder, Box 107, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

⁸¹ "Question and Answer Session with Evangelical Leaders," n.d. Folder "Moral Majority and Falwell," Box 107, Robert Maddox Series, Records of Anne Wexler, JCL.

enjoyed the frank conversation so much that he stayed for an hour. Oral Roberts led a closing prayer and Carter posed for photographs with the pastors.⁸²

Carter and Maddox left the meeting with generally positive impressions of its outcome, further illustrating the gaps in their understanding of the politicization of evangelical and fundamentalist Christians. In his diary, Carter wrote of the meeting, “In spite of all these negative opinions [about administration policies], they are basically supportive of what I’m trying to do.”⁸³ In a report to Anne Wexler, Maddox remarked that “Jerry Falwell and several other of the participants have called to say how profitable the breakfast was for them. ‘The President was candid and up front,’ they say. I hope the flack is over and the fallout will be good for the President and all concerned.”⁸⁴ However, Maddox probably exaggerated the optimism because by the end of 1980, he recalled the ill will displayed by some of the breakfast participants began almost as soon as the meeting concluded. In fact, Falwell held a press conference to comment on the meeting and, according to Maddox, began to distort the facts right away.⁸⁵

Most of the participants had mixed feelings about the meeting and retained their opinion of Carter or his policies. Jimmy Allen remained the staunchest Carter supporter present, but most of the other participants either definitely opposed or were on-the-fence

⁸² Hammond, “Twice Born, Once Elected,” 93; The able staff at the Carter Library could not locate a transcript or audio recording of this breakfast meeting, so we must rely on the recollections of the participants to know about what transpired in these discussions.

⁸³ Carter, *White House Diary*, 394.

⁸⁴ Memo, Robert Maddox to Anne Wexler, “Weekly Report,” January 25, 1980, “Correspondence File 1/80” folder, Box 99, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

⁸⁵ Robert Maddox Exit Interview Transcript, December 8, 1980, 13-14, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exitInt/Maddox.pdf>

about Carter. Some left the meeting even more determined to oppose Carter's re-election.

Tim LaHaye recalled,

I stood there and I prayed this prayer: 'God, we have got to get this man out of the White House and get someone in here who will be aggressive about bringing back traditional moral values.' And little did I know that several others prayed essentially the same prayer. We got into this limousine, and here were some of the leading ministers of America, and they were stone silent. It was just like depression had settled on all of us. We all had made a commitment to God that day that, for the first time in our lives, we were going to get involved in the political process and do everything we could to wake up the Christians to be participating citizens instead of sitting back and letting other people decide who will be our government leaders.⁸⁶

Despite Carter's best attempt to reach out to these pastors, the relationship between the Reagan campaign and the Christian Right grew ever closer as the primaries concluded and both groups turned their focus to the general election. At the 1980 Republican convention in Detroit, Reagan privately met with Falwell, Weyrich, and Phillips to discuss his vice-presidential running mate, giving them a place in his inner circle.⁸⁷ Despite claims of nonpartisanship, Falwell spoke in glowing terms about the Republican platform statement, "There is no question that the recent platform adopted in Detroit could easily be the constitution of a fundamental Baptist church...I can't say the same thing for the Democratic platform."⁸⁸ In closing his nomination acceptance speech, Reagan made a plea that resonated with the Christian Right, "I'll confess that I've been a little afraid to suggest what I'm going to suggest--I'm more afraid not to--that we begin

⁸⁶ As cited in Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 189.

⁸⁷ Hogue, "1980: Reagan, Carter, and the Politics of Religion in America," 260.

⁸⁸ "Falwell Says His Group's Endorsements Will Be for Principles, Not Candidates," *Washington Post*, August 8, 1980.

our crusade joined together in a moment of silent prayer.” After a brief pause, Reagan concluded the prayer with, “God bless America.”⁸⁹

The Reagan campaign successfully cultivated support among the Christian Right to further excite potential voters already predisposed to vote for him. In August, the Reagan campaign solidified its deep connections with the burgeoning Christian Right by hiring Robert Billings, executive director of the Moral Majority, and William Chasey, executive vice-president of governmental and political affairs for the Religious Roundtable, to coordinate the Christian outreach program for the campaign and explain to evangelical and fundamentalist voters that the “Reagan-Bush ticket is the Christian ticket.”⁹⁰

Moreover, the Reagan campaign planned a concerted media strategy to communicate directly with conservative Christian voters. Using brochures comparing Reagan with Carter and independent candidate John B. Anderson on issues important to Christian voters, the Reagan campaign hoped to utilize tracts, a traditional evangelistic tool, to mobilize Christian voters without Reagan himself having to make these comparisons.⁹¹ The Reagan campaign also ran a series of religiously-themed campaign

⁸⁹ Ronald Reagan, “Address Accepting the Presidential Nomination at the Republican National Convention in Detroit,” July 17, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25970>.

⁹⁰ Memo, Bill Timmons to Max Hugel, “Evangelical Fundamentalist Movement,” July 29, 1980, “Voter Groups—Evangelical/Born Again Admin Files” folder, Box 309, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL; Memo, Max Hugel to Bill Timmons and Elizabeth Dole, “William Chasey,” August 8, 1980, “Political Ops- Voter Groups- Christians/Evangelicals (1/4)” folder, Box 255, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL; Memo, Max Hugel to William Chasey, “Christian Voter Program,” August 19, 1980, “Voter Groups- Religious- General (4/4)” folder, Box 343, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

⁹¹ Memo, Bill Timmons to Max Hugel, “Memorandum,” June 24, 1980, “Voter Groups- Religious- General (3/4)” folder, Box 343, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

commercials during evangelical television programs on Sunday mornings in key Southern battleground states, a well-planned move since practically the entire viewing audience would be evangelical or fundamentalist and given the inexpensive costs of airtime on Sunday mornings.⁹²

As part of his larger religious outreach strategy, Reagan chose to participate in the National Affairs Briefing, an event sponsored by the Religious Roundtable, a decision that would prove to be perhaps the most important overture the campaign made to the Christian Right. The National Affairs Briefing provided campaign training to church leaders for registering voters as well as preaching on America's moral decay and informational briefings on foreign policy topics such as SALT II.⁹³ To maintain a semblance of nonpartisanship, the Religious Roundtable also invited President Carter and independent candidate John Anderson to address the audience, but both men declined. Although his staff urged him to reject the invitation as well, Reagan decided that this gathering of 14,000 evangelical and fundamentalist leaders was too important to miss.⁹⁴

Throughout his campaign, Reagan effectively used a "god strategy" in his speeches that included well-known public religious references and more subtle references that only evangelical or fundamentalist insiders would understand. Reagan's campaign

⁹² Memo, Martin Tubridy to Karyn Wellons, "Evangelicals Media Plan," September 16, 1980, "Media Campaign [Voter Groups- Evangelicals Media Plan] (Peter Dailey)" folder, Box 229, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

⁹³ Kenneth Briggs, "Evangelicals Hear Plea: Politics Now," *New York Times*, August 24, 1980.

⁹⁴ Garland Haas, *Jimmy Carter and the Politics of Frustration* (Jefferson: McFarland & Company, 1992), 157.

advisors fine tuned his public speeches to make sure his rhetoric enthralled evangelical voters, but still appealed to the broader American audience.⁹⁵

His speech at the National Affairs Briefing truly exemplified that strategy. In a memo to senior advisors Ed Meese and Mike Deaver about the Dallas speech, speechwriter Bill Gribbin wrote, “there are an awful lot of code words, religious allusions, and whatnot built into this, which might be missed if one is not close to evangelical religion. It is not important, however, for the speaker to understand each and every one of them. His audience will. Boy, will they ever!”⁹⁶ In his speech, Reagan declared, “in a struggle against totalitarian tyranny, traditional values based on religious morality are among our greatest strengths.”⁹⁷ Reagan’s relationship with the Christian Right and use of other coded language in his campaign provided clarity to what he meant when he said “traditional values based on religious morality.”

Historian Andrew Preston argued that Reagan transformed the rhetoric of American civil religion from broadly including diverse audiences to the narrower purpose of rallying his partisan supporters.⁹⁸ While Carter had used his personal faith to be inclusive of different groups, Reagan employed the historically broad language of American civil religion to energize his own supporters and portray a conflict with the

⁹⁵ David Domke and Kevin Coe, *The God Strategy: How Religion Became a Political Weapon in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3-4, 7-9.

⁹⁶ Bill Gribbin to Ed Meese, Bill Gavin, and Mike Deaver, n.d., “Speech Files- Drafts & Backup Documents- Religious Roundtable, Dallas, 8/1980 (1/3)” folder, Box 437, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

⁹⁷ “Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan at the Roundtable National Affairs Briefing,” August 22, 1980, “Speech Files- Drafts & Backup Documents- Religious Roundtable, Dallas, 8/1980 (2/3)” folder, Box 437, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

⁹⁸ Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 582.

president's allies. For his part, Carter normally shied away from functioning as a "priest" of American civil religion, preferring to serve as a "prophet" issuing jeremiads warning the nation about its transgressions and excesses.⁹⁹

Just as important as Reagan's speech to the National Affairs Briefing was his decision to attend James Robison's sermon that immediately preceded his keynote address. Governor Connally urged Reagan to sit on the stage during Robison's sermon, "I'd like you to hear James. You're going to really like this. And it will say a lot to people to watch how you respond to the values he's going to emphasize."¹⁰⁰ Reagan's body language during Robison's sermon encouraged those in attendance as he applauded at different points throughout the sermon. With Reagan behind him on the stage, Robison boldly preached, "I'm sick and tired of hearing about all the radicals and the perverts and the liberals and the leftists and the Communists coming out of the closet. It's time for God's people to come out of the closet."¹⁰¹ To recognize the nominally nonpartisan nature of the event and to verbally affirm Robison's sermon, Reagan told the audience, "I know you can't endorse me, but I endorse you."¹⁰²

The hostile atmosphere of the National Affairs Briefing convinced Carter's political advisors that they could not win over many Christian Right voters. Instead, they

⁹⁹ Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 322-23; For more on the broader concept of American civil religion, see Robert N. Bellah, "Civil Religion in America," *Daedalus* 96:1 (Winter 1967): 1-21.

¹⁰⁰ As cited in Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 217.

¹⁰¹ As cited in Hogue, "1980: Reagan, Carter, and the Politics of Religion in America," 270-271.

¹⁰² "Address by the Honorable Ronald Reagan at the Roundtable National Affairs Briefing," August 22, 1980, "Speech Files- Drafts & Backup Documents- Religious Roundtable, Dallas, 8/1980 (2/3)" folder, Box 437, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

decided the campaign should go on the offensive against the Christian Right, painting Reagan as beholden to a Christian Right intolerant of pluralism in America. In a meeting with Carter campaign advisor Tim Smith, Maddox suggested that they make light of the deep connections between Reagan's campaign staff and Christian Right organizations.¹⁰³

Several Carter administration officials likened the Christian Right and its leaders to the Islamic fundamentalist government in Iran that had been holding a number of Americans hostage since November 1979. Speaking at Princeton University in mid-September 1980, Secretary of Health and Human Services Patricia Harris commented, "I am beginning to fear that we could have an Ayatollah Khomeini in this country, but that he will not have a beard, but he will have a television program."¹⁰⁴ She further elaborated,

To argue that there is a single "Christian" viewpoint or even a religious point of view on every issue in foreign and domestic policy is to say no debate is necessary or desirable—that all that is required is unquestioning obedience to "God's will" as revealed to a single individual.¹⁰⁵

Regardless of their accuracy, Harris' comments mirrored the thinking of other administration officials and journalists.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰³ Memo, Robert Maddox to Anne Wexler, "Meeting with Tim Smith at Carter/Mondale," September 26, 1980, "Correspondence File 9/26-9/27/80" folder, Box 101, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL; Larry Chesser, "Moral Majority Helps Unseat Baptist Minister," *Baptist Press*, September 5, 1980.

¹⁰⁴ Letter, Carl McIntire to Jimmy Carter, October 16, 1980, "Correspondence File 12/1-12/15/80" folder, Box 102, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

¹⁰⁵ "For the record: From recent remarks by Patricia Harris, secretary of health and human services," *Washington Post*, October 16, 1980.

¹⁰⁶ Memo, "Suggestions for the Fall of 1980," n.d., "Correspondence n.d." folder, Box 98, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL; Ellen Hume, "Mondale, Hit by Falwell on 'Atheism,' Rips 'Right-Wingers,'" *Los Angeles Times*, October 13, 1980; Flora Lewis, "The Fundamental Urge," *New York Times*, November 28, 1980.

Even average citizens wrote letters to both Carter and Reagan about their concerns with the hardline rhetoric of the Christian Right. Eulah Eubank of Richmond, Virginia asked, “Are we going to become puppets to American type ayatollahs?”¹⁰⁷ A Georgia Republican writing to Reagan compared the Christian Right not only to Khomeini’s Islamic revolution, but also to the Spanish Inquisition.¹⁰⁸ A United Methodist minister warned the local Tallahassee Lion’s Club about the Christian Right and its similarities to Khomeini’s followers.¹⁰⁹ The media also picked up on this comparison as Anthony Lewis wrote that James Robison “used a favorite word of Ayatollah Khomeini’s, satanic, to justify political ministries” in his sermon at the National Affairs Briefing.¹¹⁰

Harris’s comments provoked outrage among the leaders of the Christian Right, who did not consider their movement to be representative of the global emergence of religious nationalism. Jim Bakker, still considering supporting Carter, responded negatively and put out feelers to the Reagan campaign.¹¹¹ Falwell delivered a rebuttal to Harris’ remarks in front of the Department of Health and Human Services building, arguing the Christian Right resulted from years of conservative suppression. He deemed

¹⁰⁷ Letter, Eulah Eubank to Robert Maddox, August 10, 1980, “Correspondence File 8/1-8/15/80” folder, Box 100, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

¹⁰⁸ Letter, Kenneth Evan Dreyfus to Ronald Reagan, August 16, 1980, “Voter Groups- Religious Correspondence (8/17)” folder, Box 342, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

¹⁰⁹ James R. Crook, “The Threat to America from the Religious Right-Wing—Address to the Tallahassee Lion’s Club,” September 25, 1980, “Voter Groups- Religious Correspondence (13/17),” Box 342, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

¹¹⁰ Anthony Lewis, “Political Religion,” *New York Times*, 9/25/80.

¹¹¹ Letter, Douglas Wead to Martin Anderson, October 10, 1980, “Research Policy- Issues Material- Religion” folder, Box 474, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

her comparison between the Christian Right and the Islamic government in Iran as “nonsense” and “ridiculous.”¹¹² In another venue, Falwell remarked, “We’re not religious fanatics who have in mind a Khomeini-type religious crusade to take over the government... We support the separation of church and state... We want influence, not control.”¹¹³

This counterattack on the Christian Right signified a larger strategy as Carter campaign officials consistently tried to paint a stark contrast between Carter and Reagan as a choice between prudence and dangerous extremism, especially because the ongoing hostage crisis in Iran and the faltering economy at home made Carter appear weak.¹¹⁴ This strategy of contrast helped Carter close the polling gap by mid-October.¹¹⁵

The Carter campaign kept up the heat on Reagan’s association with the Christian Right through a press conference by former SBC President Jimmy Allen. In a line that would soon be adopted as part of Carter’s stump speech, Allen declared that attempting to mix religion and partisan politics “damages the churches by creating a political test for religious fellowship” and “damages the states by producing a religious test for public office.”¹¹⁶

¹¹² Statement by Dr. Jerry Falwell at Department of Health and Human Services, September 29, 1980, “Voter Groups- Religious Correspondence (11/17)” folder, Box 342, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

¹¹³ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 177.

¹¹⁴ Leo Ribuffo, “Jimmy Carter and the Selling of the President, 1976-1980,” in *The Presidency and Domestic Policies of Jimmy Carter*, edited by Herbert D. Rosenbaum and Alexj Ugrinsky, (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1994), 156.

¹¹⁵ Chester Pach, “*Top Gun*, Toughness, and Terrorism: Some Reflections on the Elections of 1980 and 2004,” *Diplomatic History* 28:4 (September 2004), 558.

¹¹⁶ “Allen, Others Issue Warning Against Christian Right,” *Baptist Press*, October 7, 1980.

Reagan's speech at a Lynchburg meeting seemed less religious in its content and rhetoric than his speech at the National Affairs Briefing. The Carter campaign's effort to portray Reagan as beholden to Falwell and the Christian Right seemed to be working, so Reagan's staff wanted to show that their candidate was no religious extremist in front of an evangelical and fundamentalist audience. The speech focused primarily on the issue of world peace, seeming to mainly address Carter's criticism of Reagan being inclined to start a war.

In crafting the speech, his team sought to avoid having Reagan appear as a tool of the Christian Right. Bill Gavin wrote, "It is absolutely imperative that RR stay away from a discussion of his own spiritual life. His answer should seek to place him in a long line of Presidents who have sought Divine guidance, thereby putting his views in a historic context."¹¹⁷ In a memo preparing talking points for Reagan for a Q&A period, William Chasey noted that "RR may wish to expand his answers to include his personal commitment to Jesus (example John 3:16)." However, the staffer reading Chasey's memo wrote an emphatic "No!!" next to that particular suggestion.¹¹⁸

In the aftermath of the Lynchburg meeting, Falwell gave the Carter campaign an opportunity to continue its tactics of painting the Christian Right as an extremist group. During a press conference, a reporter asked Falwell whether he agreed with SBC President Bailey Smith's earlier statement that "God Almighty does not hear the prayer

¹¹⁷ Memo, Bill Gavin to Martin Anderson, Jim Brady, Lyn Nofziger, and Mike Deaver, "Religious Broadcasters Appearance at Lynchburg, October 3," October 2, 1980, "Speech Files- National Religious Broadcasters Assoc, Lynchburg, VA, 10/3/80" folder, Box 434, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

¹¹⁸ Bill Chasey, "Questions and Talking Points," October 3, 1980, "Speech Files- Drafts & Backup Documents- Religious Broadcasters (Lynchburg, VA) 10/3/80" folder, Box 440, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Files, RRL.

of a Jew.”¹¹⁹ Falwell responded, “I believe God...does not hear the prayers of unredeemed Gentiles or Jews.”¹²⁰ Coupled with other seemingly anti-Semitic remarks such as Jews “are spiritually blind and desperately in need of their Messiah and Savior” and “a Jew can make more money accidentally than you can on purpose,” Falwell’s response at the press conference created significant controversy because of his stature in the new Christian Right and his ardent support of Israel.¹²¹

After a week of considerable criticism and accusations of anti-Semitism, Falwell recanted with a statement through the American Jewish Committee, “God is a respecter of all persons. He loves everyone alike. He hears the heart cry of any sincere person who calls on Him.”¹²² Under intense criticism about his remarks, Falwell claimed that the Moral Majority respected American pluralism, “We’re not trying to jam our moral philosophy down the throats of others...We’re simply trying to keep others from jamming their amoral philosophies down our throats.”¹²³ Moreover, Falwell explained that the Moral Majority sought to elect candidates based on principles regardless of religious affiliation rather than merely electing other evangelical or fundamentalist

¹¹⁹ Williams, *God’s Own Party*, 190-191.

¹²⁰ Marjorie Hyer, “Evangelist Reverses Position on God’s Hearing Jews,” *Washington Post*, October 11, 1980.

¹²¹ As cited in Stephen Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel: The Story of American Christian Zionism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 118; “Quotable Quotes from Christian Groups and Leaders Supporting Ronald Reagan,” October 8, 1980, “New Right-Fundamentalists, 9/8/80-10/24/80” folder, Box 19, Office of Special Assistant for Jewish Affairs—Al Moses 1980 Campaign File, JCL.

¹²² Hyer, “Evangelist Reverses Position on God’s Hearing Jews,” *Washington Post*, October 11, 1980.

¹²³ Warren Brown, “Falwell Denies ‘Moral Majority’ Seeks to Dictate Nation’s Moral Philosophy,” *Washington Post*, October 13, 1980.

Christians.¹²⁴ Given his special relationship with Reagan, Falwell tried to sound moderate to shield Reagan from accusations of extremism due to his association with him.

Falwell also reiterated his unconditional support for Israel, pointing to the pro-Israel and Jewish-friendly nature of the Moral Majority, “one cannot belong to the Moral Majority Inc. without making the commitment to support the state of Israel in its battle for survival...No anti-Semitic influence is allowed in Moral Majority Inc.” In an ABC News interview shortly after the election, Falwell declared, “You can’t belong to Moral Majority without being a Zionist.”¹²⁵ Elsewhere, Falwell explained, “God has blessed America because America has blessed the Jew. If this nation wants her fields to remain white with grain, her scientific achievements to remain notable, and her freedom to remain intact, America must continue to stand with Israel.”¹²⁶

The entire controversy surrounding Smith and Falwell’s statements provided more ammunition for Carter to attack Reagan. Maddox surmised that, “lurking right beneath the religious and political far right is racism, anti-Semitism, war mentality. These rightists are neo-fascist.”¹²⁷ Al Moses, Carter’s advisor on Jewish affairs, wrote, “By forcing Reagan to avow or disavow these statements, you create a frightening sphere of doubt around him.”¹²⁸ Despite Falwell’s intent to make the Moral Majority an ecumenical

¹²⁴ Jerry Falwell, “Electing Born-Again Candidates Not Goal,” *Moral Majority Report*, October 15, 1980.

¹²⁵ As cited in Victoria Clark, *Allies for Armageddon: The Rise of Christian Zionism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 187.

¹²⁶ As cited in Spector, *Evangelicals and Israel*, 24.

¹²⁷ Memo, Robert Maddox to Jody Powell, “Campaign Themes,” October 7, 1980, “Correspondence File 10/6-10/15/80” folder, Box 101, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

¹²⁸ “Outreach: American Jewish Voters,” October 9, 1980, “Campaign Strategy” folder, Box 18, Office of Special Assistant for Jewish Affairs—Al Moses 1980 Campaign File, JCL.

Judeo-Christian group, his theological statements and distasteful jokes cast a shadow of anti-Semitism over his political efforts and gave credence to the Carter campaign's portrayal of the Christian Right as intolerant.

Despite earlier warnings from advisor Stu Eizenstat about accusations of “meanness” in Carter’s attacks on Reagan, Carter hammered away at Reagan’s ties to the Christian Right and some of its darker, exclusionary tendencies.¹²⁹ During a speech at a Democratic fundraiser in Chicago, Carter proclaimed, “You'll determine whether or not this America will be unified or, if I lose the election, whether Americans might be separated, black from white, Jew from Christian, North from South, rural from urban.”¹³⁰ The Reagan campaign, the Christian Right, and the mainstream and religious press criticized Carter’s remarks that linked Reagan to statements about whether or not God heard the prayers of Jews. Reagan himself concluded that Carter was now at “a point of hysteria.”¹³¹

Brushing off the criticism, Carter continued in his attacks, especially after a town hall meeting in Yatesville, Pennsylvania where Avi Leiter, a young Jewish boy, asked Carter, “Do you agree with the head of the [Southern Baptist] churches who said that God does not listen to Jewish prayers?” Carter responded that the Camp David agreements provided proof that God heard everyone’s prayers because all the major protagonists

¹²⁹ Memo, Stu Eizenstat to Jimmy Carter, “Campaign,” September 19, 1980, “9/22/80 [1]” folder, Box 206, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹³⁰ Jimmy Carter, “Chicago, Illinois Remarks at a Democratic National Committee Fundraising Reception,” October 6, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45225>.

¹³¹ Steve Weisman, “Carter and Reagan Comments Tangle Campaigns in a Controversy Surrounding Evangelical Group,” *New York Times*, October 10, 1980.

prayed together for their success.¹³² The next day, in another speech, Carter told the story of Leiter's question, declaring, "It's a question no American child should ever have to ask. In our zeal to strengthen the moral character of this Nation, we must not set ourselves up as judges of whom God might hear or whom He would turn away."¹³³

The Carter campaign also included a healthy dose of rhetoric about religious pluralism and the freedom of speech in Carter's stump speech. In a number of addresses, Carter affirmed the rights of Falwell and others to express their views.¹³⁴ However, Carter, echoing Allen's remarks following the Lynchburg meeting, frequently said, "I'm not in favor of a religious definition of an acceptable politician, and I'm not in favor of a political definition for Christian fellowship or for religious fellowship."¹³⁵ In another speech, Carter expressed the same sentiment with different wording, "But when you start putting a measuring stick on a political figure and saying he is or is not an acceptable person in the eyes of God, I remember the admonition in the New Testament: 'Judge not that ye be judged' and 'God is love.'"¹³⁶

¹³² Jimmy Carter, "Yatesville, Pennsylvania Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting," October 15, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45302>.

¹³³ Jimmy Carter, "New York, New York Remarks at the Alfred E. Smith Memorial Dinner," October 16, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45312>.

¹³⁴ Jimmy Carter, "Flint, Michigan Interview with Joe Stroud and Remer Tyson of the *Detroit Free Press*," October 1, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45192>.

¹³⁵ Jimmy Carter, "Memphis, TN Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting," October 31, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45415>.

¹³⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting," October 29, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45386>.

In a subtle attack on the Christian Right's political positions, Carter reminded audiences, "the Bible doesn't say whether there's one or two Chinas, and the Bible doesn't say how you balance the Federal budget, and the Bible doesn't say what causes pollution, and the Bible doesn't say whether or not we could have a B-1 bomber or whether we could have air-launched cruise missiles."¹³⁷ However, Andrew Preston noted that Carter's analysis ignored the Protestant Left and the Catholic Church and that "to them as to the Religious Right, the Bible was in fact pretty clear on whether the United States should develop the B-1."¹³⁸ While Carter made these speeches to deflect the Christian Right's criticism, he also desperately wanted to preserve the American religious pluralism protected by the separation of church and state, one of the doctrinal issues he cherished most from his Southern Baptist heritage.

As the general election reached its final month, the Christian Right stepped up its activities to get evangelicals and fundamentalists mobilized to vote through direct mail and other media campaigns. The Moral Majority sent out several mailers to its membership list, encouraging people to vote, contribute to the organization, and write their leaders. In a mailer entitled "Is Our Grand Old Flag Going Down the Drain?" Falwell slammed the Carter administration over issues of homosexuality, pornography, and abortion, but spent more time discussing foreign policy and national defense issues. Falwell excoriated Carter for being afraid and not upholding a sense of American pride or nationalism:

¹³⁷ Jimmy Carter, "Miami, Florida Remarks and a Question-and-Answer Session at a Town Meeting," October 21, 1980. in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45348>.

¹³⁸ Andrew Preston, *Sword of the Spirit, Shield of Faith*, 577.

I repeat: Our grand old flag is going down the drain. And not just here in America—we have broken our word with Taiwan because we are afraid of China. We are giving away the Panama Canal, so we won't "offend" a leftist government! And besides all that, our President has signed a SALT II treaty with Russians that will make us a second-rate power in three years...and one day the Russians may pick up the telephone and call Washington DC, and dictate the terms of our surrender to them.¹³⁹

Falwell's mailer further demonstrates the intense link between national defense issues and social issues in terms of defining the moral crisis that conservative Christians thought was confronting the United States.

While Falwell had become the most high-profile figure of the Christian Right and the leader most associated with Reagan, Christian Voice's electioneering activities probably had more impact in turning out the evangelical and fundamentalist vote.¹⁴⁰ Christian Voice's moral report cards compared the policy stances of candidates on issues including abortion, SALT II, and a balanced budget amendment and then gave grades on the morality of candidates' various positions. In a strategy paper, Christian Voice operatives claimed, "One reason our report cards are so effective, is that they are seen as a non-partisan, educational effort rather than as campaign propaganda... We can say the same thing as the challenger and have much greater credibility since the challenger's comments will be dismissed by many as self-serving rhetoric."¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Open Letter from Jerry Falwell, "Is Our Grand Old Flag Going Down the Drain?" n.d. Folder "Correspondence File 10/1-10/5/80," Box 101, Robert Maddox Series, Records of Anne Wexler, JCL.

¹⁴⁰ "In Paul Weyrich's estimation, Moral Majority 'was by no means the most important of the groups that had been formed,' but the media focused on it because its name was so boldly self-righteous and because 'Falwell was a good target. He was very visible and he was willing to talk to the media. So they seized upon [Moral Majority] to explain to America that 'this is what is happening. If you want to know who these people are and what they are about, there you have it.'" See Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 218-219.

¹⁴¹ "Christian Voice: Strategy and Objectives," n.d., "Christian Voice (2)" folder, OA 9084, Morton Blackwell Files, RRL.

Inspired by Christian Voice's report cards, David Balsiger's "Presidential Biblical Scorecard" clearly articulated the Christian Right's general position on national defense policy. Using a series of scriptures about city fortifications from the Old Testament, many Christian Right activists claimed a scriptural mandate for its emphasis on a strong national defense.¹⁴² Carter's move to reinstitute draft registration in peacetime was also a major point of contention for fear that women might be drafted into the armed services, a clear departure from conservative Christian norms about gender roles. The voters' guide included grim reports that the United States only has "1,000 days as a free nation before the Soviets make their military superiority and influence known against our interests here and abroad" with an admonition that "it's important that we elect national leaders who take the strongest national defense positions if we are even to have any hope of surviving as a free nation during the decade of the 80s."¹⁴³ Drawing on his belief in America's role in biblical prophecy, Hal Lindsey echoed Balsiger's sentiment for a strong national defense, "I believe that the Bible supports building a powerful military force. And the Bible is telling the United States to become strong again."¹⁴⁴

Christian Voice's contributions extended beyond their moral report cards and also included the Christians for Reagan PAC, financial assistance to conservative congressional candidates, rallies at churches on the Sunday before Election Day, and

¹⁴² The scriptures cited in the scorecard were 2 Chronicles 11: 5-11, 2 Chronicles 26: 9-15, Jeremiah 1: 18-19, Isaiah 25: 1-3, Numbers 13: 28, Deuteronomy 3:5, Numbers 20:20, Nehemiah 4:13, Ezekiel 22:30.

¹⁴³ "Presidential Biblical Scorecard," Folder "Moral Majority and Falwell," Box 107, Robert Maddox Series, Records of Anne Wexler, JCL.

¹⁴⁴ As cited in Clark, *Allies for Armageddon*, 157.

other television and radio ads.¹⁴⁵ In a retrospective report about the 1980 election, Christian Voice leaders Colonel Doner and Gary Jarmin claimed, “While [Reagan] comes in the ‘front door’ to sell/motivate this vast constituency, we...come in the back door to register, educate, and turnout the Christian vote.”¹⁴⁶

The Christian Right’s prolonged campaign of media advertisements, direct mail, pastor training, and congregational voter registration successfully trickled down to the rank-and-file evangelical and fundamentalist voters. Rosalynn Carter remembered Moral Majority activists holding signs at her campaign stops that read “You Don’t Love Jesus.”¹⁴⁷ Numerous evangelical and fundamentalist Christians wrote Carter himself or Maddox to express their dismay with the administration’s stands on a variety of domestic and foreign policy issues, frequently citing Falwell, Robison, or other Christian Right leaders as their source for information for issues such as national defense to which those pastors could claim little expertise.¹⁴⁸

Many sent the Moral Majority form letter questionnaires to the White House, asking Maddox to mark yes or no on where Carter stood on important moral issues.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁵ Christians for Reagan Mailing, n.d., “Voter Groups- Religious Correspondence (7/17)” folder, Box 342, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL; Morton Mintz, “Evangelical Group Plans Nov 2 Political Appeal at Churches,” *Washington Post*, October 5, 1980.

¹⁴⁶ Memo, Colonel Doner and Gary Jarmin to Dee Jepsen and Carolyn Sundseth, “Christian Leaders/Media Action Items,” October 5, 1983, “Christian Voice (2)” folder, OA 13324, Carolyn Sundseth Files, RRL.

¹⁴⁷ Rosalynn Carter, *First Lady from Plains*, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1984), 335-336.

¹⁴⁸ Letter, Jerry Songer to Robert Maddox, August 29, 1980, “Correspondence File 9/1-9/7/80” folder, Box 100, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL; Letter, Jack McNutt Jr. to Robert Maddox, September 26, 1980, “Correspondence File 9/26-9/27/80” folder, Box 101, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

¹⁴⁹ Letter, Robert Maddox to John Parton, October 24, 1980, “Correspondence File 10/20-10/31/80” folder, Box 102, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

Others expressed their anger at the Carter campaign's attempt to portray the Christian Right as a group of extremists. One letter writer told Maddox that Falwell, Robison, and LaHaye were "God's anointed" and that he was "positive they would never intentionally lie."¹⁵⁰ Still others resorted to insults such as "You don't even deserve to be called Baptists" or calling Carter "a master of deceit, a phony Christian and a betrayer of all true citizens of this country!" and accusing him of doing "more than any previous president to advance communism around the world."¹⁵¹

Other Christian Right voters wrote to Carter and his administration about their disgust with his treatment of Israel. Both Christian Right activists and American Jews feared that Carter had struck a deal with the Arabs in which the US would favor the Arabs in peace negotiations with Israel in a second Carter term.¹⁵² One constituent told Maddox that Carter was "not afraid to turn his back on God" in his policies toward Israel that encouraged land concessions to achieve peace.¹⁵³ Another voter wrote, "I want to strongly and vehemently protest your immoral attempts to intimidate and coerce Israel,"

¹⁵⁰ Letter, Terry Miller to Robert Maddox, October 3, 1980, "Correspondence File 10/1-10/5/80" folder, Box 101, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL; another example is Letter, Mildred Seal to Robert Maddox, October 7, 1980, "Correspondence File 10/6-10/15/80" folder, Box 101, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

¹⁵¹ Letter, Terry Miller to Robert Maddox, August 22, 1980, "Correspondence File 9/1-9/7/80" folder, Box 100, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL; Letter, unsigned to Robert Maddox, September 3, 1980, "Correspondence File 9/1-9/7/80" folder, Box 100, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

¹⁵² Memo, Stu Eizenstat to Jimmy Carter, "Campaign," September 19, 1980, "9/22/80 [1]" folder, Box 206, Office of Staff Secretary—Presidential Handwriting File, JCL.

¹⁵³ Letter, Harry George Feinstein to Robert Maddox, August 19, 1980, "Correspondence File 8/16-8/20/80" folder, Records of Anne Wexler—Robert Maddox Series, JCL.

and added, “Can this be the same Jimmy Carter whose support of Israel in 1976 sounded so sincere?”¹⁵⁴

The Christian Right also inspired evangelical and fundamentalist Christians to write Reagan and express their support for him and their disappointment with Carter. Brad Gish’s letter to Reagan demonstrated the ways in which the Christian Right had links to other causes: “The liberal, humanist, communist, integrationist, evolutionist, atheist fools seek to lead us all to ruin and damnation because they are not God...Mr. Carter is not a Christian. He is a traitor.”¹⁵⁵ Another writer criticized Carter’s foreign policy toward China and the Soviet Union noting that, “The real snake in the grass is Satan, and those who serve Satan (Red China, Russia, and ungodly people throughout God’s Earth).”¹⁵⁶ A different writer saw communism’s advance through domestic issues, claiming that ERA and abortion “are two of Russia’s greatest tools to strip us of all our morals.”¹⁵⁷ The new partisan activities of the Christian Right certainly mobilized and excited evangelicals and fundamentalists who had never engaged in the political process before to this degree.

Under withering criticism from Christian Right mailers and advertisements as well as in receipt of numerous letters from angry evangelical and fundamentalist constituents, Carter did not directly respond to these attacks in his speeches and

¹⁵⁴ As cited in Flippen, *Jimmy Carter, the Politics of Family, and the Rise of the Religious Right*, 159.

¹⁵⁵ Letter, Brad Gish to Ronald Reagan, August 25, 1980, “Voter Groups- Religious Correspondence (7/17)” folder, Box 342, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

¹⁵⁶ Letter, J.D. Diehl to Ronald Reagan, September 22, 1980, “Voter Groups- Religious Correspondence (15/17)” folder, Box 343, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

¹⁵⁷ Letter, Blanche Humphreys to Ronald Reagan, September 16, 1980, “Voter Groups- Religious Correspondence (11/17)” folder, Box 342, Ronald Reagan 1980 Presidential Campaign Papers, RRL.

continued to tout his strong views on the separation of church and state until Election Day.¹⁵⁸ Maddox had suggested a more comprehensive religious outreach strategy, but the campaign staff largely ignored or forgot about his plans until it was far too late.¹⁵⁹

However, the Carter campaign finally launched one last-ditch effort to portray Carter's faith in a favorable light with a television commercial:

Though he clearly observes our historic separation of church and state, Jimmy Carter is a deeply and clearly religious man. He takes the time to pray privately with Rosalynn each day. Under the endless pressure of the presidency, where decisions change and directions change, and even the facts change, this man knows that one thing remains constant—his faith. President Jimmy Carter.¹⁶⁰

In addition to this sole religious advertisement produced by the campaign, Maddox recalled that a group of religious lay leaders distributed 250,000 pamphlets about Carter's faith to ministers across the country, the only piece of religious mail favoring Carter's campaign.¹⁶¹

Election Day came and Reagan defeated Carter in a landslide in both the popular and electoral vote. According to political scientist Andrew Busch, Reagan received 2/3 of the white evangelical and fundamentalist vote while Carter's share of that vote dropped by twenty-five percent from 1976. Some contended that evangelical and fundamentalist

¹⁵⁸ Jimmy Carter, "Abilene, TX Remarks at a Rally with Area Residents," November 1, 1980, in Peters and Woolley, *The American Presidency Project* [online]. <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=45436>.

¹⁵⁹ Maddox, *Preacher in the White House*, 170.

¹⁶⁰ As cited in Hogue, "1980: Reagan, Carter, and the Politics of Religion in America," 302.

¹⁶¹ Robert Maddox Exit Interview Transcript, December 8, 1980, 15-16, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exitInt/Maddox.pdf>

voters provided Reagan with the necessary margin to win several southern states, but Reagan would have won the election without these states.¹⁶²

While the Christian Right succeeded in registering and mobilizing new voters, a combination of the poor economy and the Iranian hostage crisis played a more significant role in Carter's defeat. In his assessment of the impact of the Christian Right, sociologist William Martin concluded that "the election represented rejection of Jimmy Carter as much as approval of Ronald Reagan," especially since "Reagan was elected with the highest negative ratings of any successful presidential candidate in the nation's history."¹⁶³ Carter biographer Burton Kaufman argued that Carter's strategy to portray Reagan as an extremist or as ill-equipped for office backfired as voters ultimately questioned Carter's abilities rather than those of Reagan.¹⁶⁴

Whatever the extent of the Christian Right's actual role in the 1980 election, the movement's leaders claimed considerable credit for Reagan's victory. The day after the election, Falwell arrived at his Liberty Baptist College with "Hail to the Chief" playing prominently in the background.¹⁶⁵ Falwell declared that the election was "the greatest day for the cause of conservatism and American morality in my adult life" while Christian Voice leader Gary Jarmin proclaimed that Reagan's election "points to the beginning of a

¹⁶² Andrew E. Busch, *Reagan's Victory: The Presidential Election of 1980 and the Rise of the Right* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2005), 127-128.

¹⁶³ Martin, *With God on Our Side*, 220.

¹⁶⁴ Burton I. Kaufman and Scott Kaufman, *The Presidency of James Earl Carter Jr*, second edition (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006), 235.

¹⁶⁵ Gibbs and Duffy, *The Preacher and the Presidents*, 263-264.

new era.”¹⁶⁶ In a retrospective piece on the 1980 election, Tim LaHaye remarked, “Personally, I believe our Heavenly Father looked down and saw our plight. He saw thousands of us working diligently to awaken His sleeping church to its political responsibilities, and He gave us four more years of religious freedom.”¹⁶⁷ James Robison summed up the effectiveness of the Christian Right to Ed Meese, “For we proved we had the channels of communication which would bypass much of the distortion of the liberal media and go directly to the people who identify with [Reagan’s] stands.”¹⁶⁸

Maddox, the person in Carter’s camp with the most perspective on the Christian Right’s role in the 1980 election, concluded that religious outreach efforts on Carter’s behalf were too little, too late because his staff had taken the support of the religious community for granted for far too long. Maddox recognized that he, Carter, and the rest of the staff did not do an adequate job of explaining Carter’s faith and its role in his presidency to a religious audience that had exceedingly high expectations of his administration, especially because Carter defined his evangelical faith differently from those in the Christian Right.¹⁶⁹ In his book, Maddox still seemed puzzled why conservative Christians could support Reagan on “moral and spiritual grounds,” rather than just “political grounds.”¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁶ Kenneth Briggs, “Dispute on Religion Raised by Campaign,” *New York Times*, November 9, 1980.

¹⁶⁷ Tim LaHaye, “The Election of Our Lifetime,” *Religious Broadcasting*, July/August 1984, 14-15.

¹⁶⁸ Letter, James Robison to Ed Meese, n.d., “Religious Groups (1)” folder, OA 9086, Morton Blackwell Files, RRL.

¹⁶⁹ Robert Maddox Exit Interview Transcript, December 8, 1980, 12, 18-19, <http://www.jimmycarterlibrary.gov/library/exitInt/Maddox.pdf>

¹⁷⁰ Maddox, *Preacher at the White House*, 165; Michael Hammond argued that Maddox’s “fondness” for Carter clouded his ability to see the real political and theological differences between the president and these conservative Christian leaders. See Hammond, “Twice Born, Once Elected,” 92.

Ultimately, Carter's adversarial relationship with the emergent Christian Right resulted from raised evangelical expectations about Carter's born-again presidency, the differences in what being an evangelical Christian meant to Carter and the Christian Right, and Carter's decision to largely ignore the religious community in his first two years in office. Domestic turmoil in the United States and international crises contributed to the rise of a religious nationalist movement among conservative evangelical and fundamentalist Christians concerned with moral degradation at home and weakened American power abroad. However, the Christian Right was appalled by attempts to explain their movement in terms of the broader global phenomenon of religious nationalism, particularly comparisons to Khomeini's Iran. The Christian Right especially opposed many of Carter's foreign policy decisions including the Panama Canal treaties, support of majority rule in Rhodesia, the SALT II Treaty, and his more measured approach to Middle East peace negotiations. As religious studies scholar Martin Marty observed, "Somehow, in their eyes [the Christian Right], decisions like the Panama treaty deal made [Carter] 'unborn again.'"¹⁷¹

¹⁷¹ As cited in Dan Ariail and Cheryl Heckler-Feltz, *The Carpenter's Apprentice: The Spiritual Biography of Jimmy Carter* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 42.

Chapter 7

"BLESSED IS THE PEACEMAKER": JIMMY CARTER'S CONTINUED ENTANGLEMENT IN THE ISRAELI-PALESTINIAN CONFLICT

In a 2007 speech at Mansfield College, former president Jimmy Carter joked about the intractable nature of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. “Pope John Paul II,” he said, “once declared that two solutions were possible to the Palestine-Israel conflict—the realistic and the miraculous. The realistic would involve a divine intervention, from heaven; the miraculous would be a voluntary agreement between the two parties!”¹

Since leaving office, Carter failed to work any miracles between the Israelis and Palestinians. He hoped to see the emergence of an independent Palestinian state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip and the establishment of formal diplomatic relations between Israel and the rest of the Arab world. However, the President who had brought about the Camp David Accords allowed his public statements to compromise his own professed role as an honest broker and peacemaker in the conflict. Carter damaged his status as an impartial mediator when he scolded Israel for its policies on the Palestinian issue. Carter became more critical of Israel in part because he no longer had to seek votes from American Jews or other strongly pro-Israel voters. His views also changed as a result of spending more time in the Middle East meeting with different parties in the conflict with widely varied perspectives. Moreover, as the Southern Baptist Convention became more politically and theologically conservative, Carter condemned the fundamentalist trend in American Christianity while his own faith moved in more progressive directions,

¹ Jimmy Carter, “Peace with Justice in the Middle East,” Remarks at Mansfield College, June 21, 2007. http://cartercenter.org/news/editorials_speeches/oxford_062107.html

loosening his fond attachment to Israel and increasing his sensitivity to Palestinian human rights concerns.²

In any solution to the Middle East conflict, Carter reserved an important role for the United States and private citizens like himself as third party mediators. Carter contended that the United States constitutes the only third party that remains acceptable to both the Israelis and the Palestinians that can garner international support for the execution of a peace plan.³ The motivation for US involvement in the peace process transformed over time as international circumstances changed. During Carter's administration, the Cold War and the threat of nuclear war in the region of Armageddon and Megiddo from biblical prophecy loomed as the main motivation for US involvement in the peace process. In the post-Cold War world, threats of Soviet subversion and nuclear war between the superpowers subsided, but the Middle East remained a flashpoint.⁴ In fact, Carter argued that the Arab resentment of the Palestinian situation was one of the leading causes in the rapid rise of terrorism in the Middle East, so a less

² Carter wrote extensively about the problems of fundamentalism in *Our Endangered Values: America's Moral Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006). See Oran P. Smith, *The Rise of Baptist Republicanism* (New York: New York University Press, 1997) for more about the conservative transformation in the Southern Baptist Convention.

³ Jimmy Carter, "Remarks on Middle East Peace," Speech at Herzliya Conference in Israel, January 23, 2006, <http://cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc2280.html>

⁴ For a history of American peace efforts in the Middle East since Carter (written by American State Department and National Security Council officials), see Dennis Ross: *The Missing Peace: The Inside Story of the Fight for Middle East Peace* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2004); Aaron David Miller, *The Much Too Promised Land: America's Elusive Search for Arab-Israeli Peace*, (New York: Bantam Books, 2008); Elliott Abrams, *Tested by Zion: The Bush Administration and the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

objectionable US involvement in the region would help reduce the number of potential terrorists.⁵

Along with an American commitment to serving as a mediator, Carter long emphasized the potential of his own role as an honest broker. While president, Carter could not meet with PLO leader Yasser Arafat because the State Department deemed him a terrorist, but as a private citizen, Carter touted both his ability to meet with individuals whom high-level US officials may be forbidden to meet and his access to important government officials from all sides.⁶

Carter's detractors criticized the former president not only for his decisions to meet with pariahs, such as Arafat and the leaders of Hamas, but also for the religious and theological language he used in explaining the conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians and the possible solutions to the dispute. Even during his presidency, Carter never quite championed Israel like Harry Truman. Recalling the image of the Persian emperor Cyrus who permitted the Jews to return to Israel after seventy years of Babylonian captivity, history professor Paul Charles Merkley argued that Carter began a paradigm shift in American presidents not presenting themselves as "the heirs of Cyrus but as champions of the peace process."⁷

Unlike Truman, Carter dabbled in reading liberal mainline Protestant theologians, such as Paul Tillich and Reinhold Niebuhr, who did not share the evangelical conviction

⁵ Jimmy Carter, "The Choice for Israelis," *The Washington Post*, September 23, 2003.

⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Middle East Peace: New Opportunities," *The Washington Quarterly* 10:3 (Summer 1987), 2.

⁷ Paul Charles Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel: The Heirs of Cyrus* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 2004), ix.

about Israel's importance in the end times. Carter often cited Niebuhr as a major influence in his religious thinking because of Niebuhr's attempts to address the tension between individual *agape* love and social justice.⁸ Traditionally, evangelicals such as those in the Southern Baptist Convention have been more pro-Israel than mainline Protestants such as Tillich and Niebuhr because the latter view the Israeli-Palestinian conflict through the lens of human rights rather than a millennial reading of the scriptures.⁹ Carter's evangelical background and his studies in mainline theology led to an unusual mixture of the two regarding Israel: a tension between supporting Israel on biblical terms and protecting human rights and social justice in the occupied territories.¹⁰

In addition to his evolving religious convictions, the legacy of the Camp David Accords and the conditions surrounding those negotiations in 1978 decisively shaped Carter's post-presidential peacemaking ventures. On one occasion, Carter asserted that he did not have "any particular affinity" for the Camp David Accords being used as a label for the continuation of the peace process.¹¹ However, it quickly became clear that Carter sought to protect and extend the legacy of the Camp David Accords after leaving office as a third-party negotiator in the conflict. Later in his life, Carter regretted that the spirit of the Camp David Accords produced little follow-through in terms of other Arab nations

⁸ See Reinhold Niebuhr, *Moral Man & Immoral Society: A Study in Ethics and Politics* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1932).

⁹ Samuel Freedman, "Carter and the Christians," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 26, 2007.

¹⁰ Mainline Protestants were actually devoted supporters of Israel in its early years for humanitarian reasons because they believed Christian anti-Semitism drove the Holocaust and the historic persecution of the Jews. See Caitlin Carenen, *The Fervent Embrace: Liberal Protestants, Evangelicals, and Israel*, (New York: New York University Press, 2012).

¹¹ Jimmy Carter, "Middle East Peace: New Opportunities," *The Washington Quarterly* 10:3 (Summer 1987), 2.

extending diplomatic recognition to Israel in the thirty years since Menachem Begin and Anwar Sadat signed the Accords (Jordan was the only other state since Camp David to do so).¹² He recalled that he anticipated a domino effect in Middle East peace, “I left office believing that Israel would soon realize the dream of peace with its other neighbors, becoming a small nation no longer beleaguered. It would exemplify the finest ideals based on the Hebrew scriptures I have taught on Sundays since I was eighteen years old.”¹³

However, the legacy of Camp David was not entirely positive because Carter’s increasing criticism of Israel reflected a grudge against Begin and the Israelis for failing to withdraw from the occupied territories and move forward on the Palestinian question after 1980. Carter believed that Begin betrayed him on the Palestinian question. At the beginning of his administration, only a few hundred settlers lived in the West Bank and Gaza, but the number of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories rapidly expanded during subsequent Likud governments after Carter lost the presidency to Ronald Reagan.¹⁴ In a 1984 lecture delivered at Macon University on the topic of negotiation, Carter accused Israel of constructing more settlements to impede the peace by creating “facts in the occupied territories, which later will be difficult to change.”¹⁵ In his memoirs, he recalled disputes with Begin during his presidency and observed that,

¹² Trip Report by Former US President Jimmy Carter to Israel, Palestine, Egypt, Syria, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan: April 13-22, 2008. April 22, 2008. http://cartercenter.org/news/trip_reports/middle_east_2008.html

¹³ Carter, *Beyond the White House* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2007), 115.

¹⁴ Jimmy Carter, “Colonization of Palestine Precludes Peace,” *Ha’aretz*, March 13, 2006.

¹⁵ Jimmy Carter, *Negotiation: The Alternative to Hostility* (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1984), 21.

...the Camp David accords had now become almost like the Bible, with the words and phrases taking on a special importance. When we got into an argument, we would flip the pages of the accords, searching for a way to authenticate our own opinions. The problem was that the actual words—such as ‘autonomy,’ ‘security,’ ‘Palestinian rights,’ and even ‘West Bank’—had different meanings for each of us and those we represented.”¹⁶

Carter and Begin had a frosty relationship from the beginning because Begin lacked the president’s commitment to swapping land for peace and instead desired Israeli security while holding as much territory as possible. After leaving office, Carter frankly noted his strained relationship with Begin, stressing that “it might be good to let the future president deal with [Begin] and the Middle East... There were a few positive things about losing the election.”¹⁷

Despite his relationship with Begin, Carter strongly believed that a comprehensive settlement to the conflict might have occurred only if he had won a second term in 1980.¹⁸ Kenneth Stein, a history professor at Emory University and the first executive director of the Carter Center, wrote that Carter had a “missionary zeal” regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In fact, Stein explained that “Carter is convinced that he himself was the essential ingredient to enable the Egyptian-Israeli peace.”¹⁹

¹⁶ Jimmy Carter, *Keeping Faith: Memoirs of a President* (New York: Bantam Books, 1982), 495.

¹⁷ Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter, *Everything to Gain: Making the Most of the Rest of Your Life*, revised edition (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1995), 8-9.

¹⁸ Bob Thompson, “Peace Provocateur—Jimmy Carter’s New Hammer? It Looks an Awful Lot Like a Book,” *Washington Post*, December 10, 2006.

¹⁹ CAMERA, *Bearing False Witness: Jimmy Carter’s “Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid”* (Boston: The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, 2007), 48-49.

With this perception of his own importance in the peace process, Carter stayed heavily involved in the trajectory of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict after 1981. After Islamic extremists assassinated Sadat in October 1981 for his role in negotiating peace between Israel and Egypt, Carter attended the funeral as part of the American delegation along with former presidents Richard Nixon and Gerald Ford. Carter had forged a very close friendship with Sadat, still counting him as one of his best friends. Initially, Jimmy and Rosalynn planned to attend the funeral as private citizens and to stay with the Sadat family in Cairo at the invitation of Sadat's widow. However, the State Department convinced Carter to attend as part of the formal delegation for security concerns. While traveling to and from Egypt, Carter and Ford let go of the animosity left over from the 1976 election and formed a partnership and friendship to aid one another in their post-presidential initiatives. In fact, Carter and Ford issued a joint statement on their return to the United States, calling for the Reagan administration to begin a dialogue with the PLO to move the peace process forward.²⁰

One of the earliest fruits of the Carter-Ford collaboration was a consultation on Middle East peace, co-chaired by the former presidents, which brought leaders and scholars from across the region together to discuss the prospects for peace in a less formal setting. As the Carter Center took shape, Kenneth Stein encouraged Carter to host a meeting in 1983 to celebrate the fifth anniversary of the Camp David Accords, examining its strengths and weaknesses and exploring the possibilities for the future of the peace process. Carter recruited Ford to co-chair the consultation to make it a

²⁰ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency: Jimmy Carter's Journey Beyond the White House* (New York: Penguin Books, 1998), 66-70.

bipartisan event and create support for the event across the American political spectrum.²¹

To prepare the meeting, Carter planned a trip to visit all the major leaders of the Middle East to gain their varying perspectives and invite them to send participants to the Carter Center consultation. On this regional tour, he met with leaders and ordinary people in Israel, Lebanon, Syria, Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the West Bank, and Gaza Strip to hold conversations about the path toward peace. The conversations from this trip would not only provide insight for the upcoming consultation, but also function as the narrative backbone for Carter's first book on Middle East policy, *The Blood of Abraham*. In addition to his travels, Carter immersed himself in the religious issues that made the conflict more complicated. He spent a considerable amount of time with scholars specializing in Islam and Judaism and studying the Qur'an and the Torah to further understand the positions of Muslims and Jews in their dispute over the Holy Land. Although his relationship with Begin sparked animosity, before this course of study Carter had not openly sympathized with the Palestinians. As he researched the roots of the conflict and met with leaders and ordinary people from around the region, he empathized with their cause.²²

Following his tour of the Middle East, Carter delivered a speech to the Council on Foreign Relations in which he bluntly stated "Israel is the problem toward peace." Stein advised the former president that his rhetoric would undermine the consultation's

²¹ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 91-92.

²² Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 102.

potential for success.²³ His warning proved prophetic. No high-profile Israeli leaders participated, whether due to Carter's rhetoric or, more likely, due to the presence of Palestinian historian Walid Khalidi, whom Israelis claimed was a member of the PLO.²⁴ The consultation proceeded with a few bumps along the way as the Syrian and Jordanian delegates refused to speak to one another, the Syrians attacked US foreign policy in the region, and one of the Jordanians chose to ignore direct questions from the Israeli scholars.²⁵ During the meeting, both Carter and Ford shared their frustration with the participants about Congress overriding presidential directives to reduce aid to Israel as a means to persuade them to withdraw from Lebanon or the West Bank.²⁶ The consultation produced a substantial dialogue on the issues that had to be addressed in the peace process and got the different parties in the same room to at least listen to one another. However, the lack of official Israeli government participation in the meeting indicated that there was still a long way to go in achieving peace.²⁷

After his Middle East trip and the Carter Center consultation in November 1983, the former president and Stein collaborated to write *The Blood of Abraham*, a book drawing largely upon the conversations Carter had with Middle East leaders in their countries and in Atlanta. Carter described the book as a "labor of love" and in a moment

²³ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 116. Carter delivered the speech on March 24, 1983 to the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City. The entire transcript is available in Carter's post-presidential papers which researchers do not have access to yet.

²⁴ "Israel to Shun Conference," *New York Times*, October 26, 1983.

²⁵ "Catching Up on the Middle East," *Time*, November 21, 1983.

²⁶ William F. Schmidt, "Mideast Conference in Atlanta Draws Arab and US Officials," *New York Times*, November 9, 1983.

²⁷ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 117-119.

of self-promotion, proclaimed, “I wish I had this book when I was first elected president.”²⁸

While Stein, an American Jew, counseled Carter to take a big picture view of the region’s tangled religious history, Carter boldly called for more progress in the peace process by making an appeal in religious terms: “The blood of Abraham, God’s father of the chosen, still flows in the veins of Arab, Jew, and Christian, and too much of it has been spilled in grasping for the inheritance of the revered patriarch in the Middle East. The spilled blood in the Holy Land still cries out to God—an anguished cry for peace.”²⁹ However, Carter’s views on the conflict went beyond the shared ancestry among the three different world religions. Instead, he recognized that religion frequently obstructed the quest for Middle East peace: “Tragically, for ‘the People of the Book’ who profess to worship the same God, the scriptures are a source of more difference than agreement.”³⁰

Carter’s use of theological language in *The Blood of Abraham* ensured more embroilment in this conflict already fraught with religious symbolism. While many Israelis assert their right to the land based on God’s covenant with the Hebrew patriarch Abraham, a few Palestinians respond with a biblical claim of their own, arguing their ties to the ancient Canaanites.³¹ In his chapter on the Palestinians, Carter wrote, “The Palestinians, like the Jews, claim to be driven by religious conviction based on the

²⁸ Wolf Blitzer, “Carter claims Reagan flubs Mideast peace openings,” *The New York Jewish Week*, April 5, 1985.

²⁹ Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham: Insights into the Middle East* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1985), 208.

³⁰ Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 5.

³¹ Rosemary Radford Ruether and Herman J. Ruether, *The Wrath of Jonah: The Crisis of Religious Nationalism in the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict*, second edition (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002), 96.

promises of God, and they consider themselves to have comprised the admixture of all peoples including the ancient Hebrews who dwelt in Palestine, their homeland, since earliest biblical times.”³² Merkley later observed that this passage proved Carter accepted a flawed historical theory that the Palestinians descended from the ancient Canaanites, Amorites, Hittites, Perizzites, Hivites, Jebusites, and Philistines who inhabited the land when the Israelites arrived. This assumption gives equality to the claims of the Jews and Palestinians seeking rights for the territory of the Holy Land.³³

In a later interview, Carter recalled how intensely he studied the Bible in preparation for writing *The Blood of Abraham*. He reflected on Pauline writings meant to encourage first century Jewish Christians, “Paul made a very strong distinction that Abraham was rewarded not for his race, but for his faith...And this is the explanation that Paul gave, that we Christians who share Abraham’s faith, regardless of our race, are also children of Abraham.”³⁴ Based on his study of Paul, Carter justified Christian claims to the Holy Land, not only for Palestinian Christians who had been evicted from their property, but also for American Christians like himself who believed they had an intimate stake in the outcome of Middle East peace talks.

Although tame compared to the criticism reserved for his more recent books on the Middle East conflict, many Jewish critics quickly pointed to the shortcomings in Carter’s *The Blood of Abraham*. Famed Orientalist scholar Bernard Lewis pointed to Carter’s tremendous use of understatement in the book when it came to topics such as

³² Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 113.

³³ Merkley, *American Presidents, Religion, and Israel*, 140-141.

³⁴ As cited in Richard G. Hutcheson, Jr., *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1988), 126.

“authoritarian leadership” in Arab countries.³⁵ Novelist Mark Helprin described Carter’s work as “a travel memoir with a biblical head and a thrashing polemical tail” and “so poorly presented that a reader would do far better to consult the Europa Guide to ‘The Middle East and North Africa.’”³⁶ Journalist Bernard Gwertzman portrayed the book as “hastily put together.” He also questioned Carter’s evenhandedness because the former president demonstrated “sympathy for the Palestinian and Arab causes,” but “impatience with...Israeli leaders.”³⁷ Columnist Stephen Rosenfeld noted that Carter’s attempt to be evenhanded in the book had “a strained clenched-teeth quality” and that the book contained “a scarcely concealed onesidedness” favorable to the Arabs and Palestinians.³⁸

As he became more knowledgeable about the Middle East conflict through his regional trip, the Carter Center consultation, and writing *The Blood of Abraham*, Carter experienced profound anguish about mistakes he made while negotiating the Camp David Accords. Due to an American promise to Israel to not engage with PLO representatives, Carter had no contact with PLO leader Arafat or any of his subordinates while in office. He regretted trying to negotiate Palestinian issues with Begin and Sadat without Palestinian representation at Camp David.³⁹ Free of those obligations, Carter actively sought to meet Arafat face-to-face and build a relationship with him through intermediary

³⁵ Bernard Lewis, “The Search for Symmetry,” *New York Times*, April 28, 1985.

³⁶ Mark Helprin, “Polemic in a Peanut Shell,” *Wall Street Journal*, April 15, 1985.

³⁷ Bernard Gwertzman, “Book Review: *The Blood of Abraham*,” *New York Times*, April 18, 1985.

³⁸ Stephen S. Rosenfeld, “Book Review: *The Blood of Abraham*,” *Washington Post*, March 31, 1985.

³⁹ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 238.

Mary King.⁴⁰ He believed that he could “coach” Arafat to become a respectable political leader and a conciliatory peacemaker, transforming him from terrorist to statesman, following Begin’s example.⁴¹

Carter finally met Arafat in Paris in April 1990, and almost instantly established a connection resembling the one the former president shared with Sadat. To legitimize the PLO in the peace process, Carter pressed Arafat to accept the terms of the Camp David Accords dealing with Palestinian autonomy and renouncing language in the PLO charter that refused to recognize Israel’s right to exist. After their formal meeting, Jimmy and Rosalynn prayed with Arafat for peace and justice in the Middle East in a more private setting.⁴² The French Jewish community protested the meeting while the Israeli ambassador to France noted, “The problem is that Arafat was in Baghdad two days ago with [Iraqi President] Saddam Hussein at his side, and he said he will fight Israel with the Iraqi missile.”⁴³ However, in public statements following the meeting, Carter commended

⁴⁰ Mary King is currently professor of peace and conflict studies at the University for Peace, a UN-sponsored organization. She was a civil rights volunteer for the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) during the 1960s and worked in the Carter administration coordinating Peace Corps and national volunteer service programs. King’s husband, Peter Bourne, served Carter as an advisor on health and drugs policy and later wrote a biography on Carter. Mary E. King, “Biography,” http://maryking.info/?page_id=3.

⁴¹ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 318, 323-324. Many Jews would argue that Begin was a freedom fighter rather than a terrorist. Prior to the creation of Israel, Menachem Begin led the Irgun, an underground paramilitary organization challenging British rule in the Mandate of Palestine, most notably bombing the King David Hotel in 1946. See Menachem Begin, *The Revolt*, revised edition (New York: Dell Publishing, 1978) and Amos Perlmutter, *The Life and Times of Menachem Begin* (New York: Doubleday, 1987).

⁴² Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 325-329.

⁴³ Sharon Waxman, “Carter, Arafat Meet on Middle East Peace Plan,” *Washington Post*, April 5, 1990.

Arafat as “one of those key leaders who’s done everything he can in recent months to promote the peace process.”⁴⁴

Unfortunately, the goodwill toward the PLO generated by the Arafat-Carter meeting quickly dissipated with Iraq’s invasion of Kuwait in August 1990. While many Arab countries supported the US effort to convince Saddam Hussein’s forces to leave Kuwait, Arafat backed the Iraqi leader, much to Carter’s chagrin. However, Carter criticized the George H.W. Bush administration’s decision to send troops to the Persian Gulf and the use of force, preferring a diplomatic solution.⁴⁵ Fearful that the Gulf War would further stall the peace process, Carter advocated using the crisis as an occasion to hold an international conference to resolve regional issues including Kuwait and the Palestinian territories. He argued, “Linked or not, there is no way to separate the crisis in the Persian Gulf from the Israeli-Palestinian question.”⁴⁶ Carter even sent letters to the leaders of the other UN Security Council countries and Arab members of the US coalition pleading with them to spend more time seeking a diplomatic solution, a move that infuriated the Bush administration.⁴⁷

After the conclusion of the Gulf War, the Bush administration launched a round of peace talks in Madrid in late October 1991, bringing Israel, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and the Palestinians to the table to discuss a variety of contentious issues. Two major landmarks came out of the Madrid talks: the Oslo Accords of 1993, an agreement to

⁴⁴ Rone Tempest, “Carter Talks to Arafat, Draws Israeli Rebuke,” *Los Angeles Times*, April 5, 1990.

⁴⁵ Jimmy Carter, “First Steps Toward Peace,” *Newsweek*, 12/17/90; Jimmy Carter, “Don’t Reject a Cease-Fire,” *Time*, February 25, 1991.

⁴⁶ Jimmy Carter, “Needed: Middle East Peace Talks,” *New York Times*, January 2, 1991.

⁴⁷ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 340-342.

permit a limited degree of Palestinian autonomy in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and the Israeli-Jordanian peace treaty of 1994. In fact, Arafat arranged an urgent meeting with Carter in Yemen to inform him of the momentous developments that took place in the secret Oslo negotiations that would lead to the establishment of the Palestinian Authority. He met with Arafat again the day before the signing ceremony at the White House. The former president counseled the Palestinian leader to create democratic political institutions and avoid authoritarian rule. Carter and former President Bush had front row seats at the signing ceremony, witnessing history that they helped create. Although Carter did not play an instrumental role in these major advances in the peace process, many commentators acknowledged his role in making the present agreements possible with his initial achievement at Camp David in 1978.⁴⁸

As a result of the Oslo Accords, Arafat asked his new friend to monitor the first elections for the new Palestinian Authority that would have limited governing powers in the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Carter readily agreed because he felt the Palestinian elections represented one of the last steps to a final status agreement that would end the decades-long Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, his hopes quickly faded once he arrived in the territories and learned of the numerous obstacles preventing successful elections. Carter immediately realized that Israeli security measures that curtailed Palestinians' freedom of movement would hinder the success of the elections. He successfully pleaded with Prime Minister Shimon Peres and General Uri Dayan to open

⁴⁸ Brinkley, *The Unfinished Presidency*, 377-382.

up security checkpoints along key roads to ensure that voters could reach their polling places and to keep Israeli soldiers away to avoid voter intimidation.⁴⁹

Problems also abounded on the Palestinian side as the Central Election Commission changed procedures and regulations for campaigning and voting until right before the election. The overwhelming influence of the Fatah-dominated PLO in the transitional administration reduced opportunities for candidates running in opposition to the secular nationalists in Fatah.⁵⁰ Hamas, a Palestinian religious nationalist organization, decided to boycott the presidential and legislative elections because the Palestinian Authority arose from the Oslo Accords, an agreement they vehemently opposed. Nevertheless, some Hamas members ran as Islamist candidates for the legislature under the Salvation Party banner and the organization pledged to contest municipal elections.⁵¹ At Arafat's request, Carter met with Hamas leader Mahmoud al-Zahar to convince Hamas to accept the election results and to not violently disrupt the first-ever Palestinian elections.⁵²

How to handle the Palestinian voters in East Jerusalem was more problematic than any other issue, and the issue would plague all subsequent Palestinian elections. The Israelis maintained that Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem must vote by absentee ballots because Jerusalem constituted part of the State of Israel. Of course, Palestinians

⁴⁹ Carter, *Beyond the White House*, 116.

⁵⁰ Shaul Mishal and Avraham Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas: Vision, Violence, and Coexistence*, second edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006), 137-138.

⁵¹ Mishal and Sela, *The Palestinian Hamas*, 140; Beverly Milton-Edwards and Stephen Farrell, *Hamas: The Islamic Resistance Movement* (Malden: Polity Press, 2010), 231-232.

⁵² Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2006), 144.

considered East Jerusalem as the national capital of their future state and wanted voters to participate in the same fashion as voters deep within the West Bank or Gaza Strip. In fact, the controversy over East Jerusalem threatened the entire election process. To save the Palestinian elections from being cancelled, Carter negotiated a compromise acceptable to both the Israelis and Palestinians: “to have the slots in the top edges of the ballot boxes! Palestinians could claim they were dropping in their ballots vertically as on-site votes while Israelis could maintain that the envelopes were being inserted horizontally as letters to be mailed.” Moreover, the East Jerusalem polling places would be located in post offices to placate the Israelis.⁵³

Carter’s penchant for detail produced a compromise that allowed the elections in East Jerusalem to proceed, but voter turnout in the city was very low. The former president noted that only about 1,600 Palestinian voters in East Jerusalem participated in the elections due to a variety of obstacles such as Israeli police officers videotaping voters who entered the polling places.⁵⁴ However, total voter turnout among the Palestinians hovered around 75 percent of all registered voters and international observers reported problems in only two of the 1,696 polling places outside East Jerusalem.⁵⁵

The Palestinian people elected Arafat as their first president with 88 percent of the vote and gave Arafat’s Fatah Party about 75 percent of the seats in the Palestinian

⁵³ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 144.

⁵⁴ Bill Hutman, “Observers blast ‘police intimidation’ in PA election,” *The Jerusalem Post*, January 21, 1996.

⁵⁵ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 145. Of 200,000 Arab residents of East Jerusalem, only 4,000 were given permits to vote in the East Jerusalem polling places. See Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 142-143.

Authority's Legislative Council.⁵⁶ Carter was satisfied with the election process despite many of the obstacles it faced. He remained hopeful for Palestinian success in governance. In his previous meetings with Israeli Prime Minister Peres, Carter had extracted assurances that the newly elected Palestinian legislators would have freedom of movement between the West Bank and Gaza Strip to conduct business for the new Palestinian Authority.⁵⁷

However, not everyone agreed with Carter's optimistic assessment of the openness and fairness of the Palestinian elections. In the weeks before the election, Carl Lidbom, chief of the European Electoral Unit monitoring the election alongside the Carter Center, complained that Arafat kept changing the rules too close to election day. The organization Reporters Without Borders issued a statement criticized Arafat's election commission for not permitting equal press time for opposition candidates.⁵⁸ Edward Abington Jr., the US consul general in Jerusalem, echoed the organization's objection, "the Palestinian media is slavishly devoted to Arafat. There is no policy of fair coverage."⁵⁹ When one critic told Carter of the rampant fraud he perceived in the elections, Carter responded, "If you really want to see election fraud, let me take you to Chicago."⁶⁰

⁵⁶ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 145.

⁵⁷ Carter, *Beyond the White House*, 117-118.

⁵⁸ Mary Curtius, "Palestinian Election Plans Criticized; Mideast: International monitors complain of Arafat's last-minute changes for Jan 20 vote," *Los Angeles Times*, January 2, 1996.

⁵⁹ Marjorie Miller, "'President Arafat' Finally Runs for Office—His Way," *Los Angeles Times*, January 15, 1996.

⁶⁰ "Fraud and advocates," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 24, 1996.

Carter believed the prospects for peace seemed promising in the wake of the Oslo Accords and the Palestinian elections. Despite criticism about the conduct of the elections, Carter believed Arafat was the only Palestinian leader able to achieve a lasting peace. However, shortly after President Clinton's attempt to negotiate a final status agreement between Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak failed in July 2000, a second intifada erupted in the territories and spilled over into Israel. The second intifada was more violent than the first intifada that began in 1987, especially because Hamas introduced suicide bombing tactics by militant members who wanted an Islamist Palestinian state encompassing all the land of Palestine. In addition to the pessimism after Clinton's failed Camp David Summit, the second intifada began a response to Likud leader Ariel Sharon's provocative visit to the Temple Mount (site of Islamic holy sites of the Dome of the Rock and the al-Aqsa Mosque) along with a large number of armed Israeli police.⁶¹ The Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon also inspired Hamas in the second intifada because many leaders believed that the Shi'ite militant group Hezbollah pushed the Israelis out of Lebanon.⁶²

As Carter became an increasingly controversial figure in the first decade of the new century, the former president decided to sever his lifelong ties with the Southern Baptist Convention in October 2000, a step representing Carter's theological evolution. Citing the "increasingly rigid Southern Baptist Convention creed, including some provisions that violate the basic premises of my Christian faith," Carter's decision

⁶¹ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 149-150.

⁶² Augustus Richard Norton, *Hezbollah: A Short History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 92-93.

reflected a reaction to the Convention's decision to prohibit the ordination of female pastors or deacons within the denomination as part of a continuing trend toward biblical literalism.⁶³ Carter had grown distant from the SBC since the beginning of the conservative takeover in 1979, but he retained his ties to the convention. In fact, in 1997 and 1998, Carter brought the liberal and conservative Baptist factions to the Carter Center, hoping to heal the rifts. Just like he did at Camp David in 1978 and with the Israelis, Arabs, and Palestinians in more recent years, Carter went back and forth between the two groups that would not meet together.

Carter tried again in 2008 to reconcile the divisions among Baptists, including northern Baptists and black Baptists in a meeting boycotted by the SBC, whose President Frank Page condemned the gathering's "smoke-screen left-wing liberal agenda."⁶⁴ Despite his efforts at reconciliation, Carter's theology and convictions bore more similarity to those of Jim Wallis, the most well-known progressive evangelical leader, than any Southern Baptist leader. Not surprisingly, Carter's convictions led him to sympathize more with the Palestinians on the basis of social justice and God's care for the poor and oppressed rather than favoring Israel on the grounds of a literal reading of Genesis 12:3 or a premillennial reading of Revelation.⁶⁵

⁶³ Somini Sengupta, "Carter Sadly Turns Back on National Baptist Body," *New York Times*, October 21, 2000.

⁶⁴ Richard Fausset, "Carter's personal mission; A peacemaker with the Nobel to prove it, the ex-president is grieved by his inability to heal the liberal-conservative rift in his own church," *Los Angeles Times*, February 1, 2008.

⁶⁵ In fact, Carter wrote the foreword to one of Wallis's books, *The Great Awakening: Reviving Faith & Politics in a Post-Religious Right America* (New York: HarperOne, 2008).

To the now ex-Southern Baptist Carter, prospects for peace seemed very dim as George W. Bush took office. After the September 11 terrorist attacks, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon portrayed Palestinians participating in the second intifada as part of the larger enemy in the global war on terrorism proposed by Bush. As a result, Bush and Sharon agreed to force a “regime change” of sorts on the Palestinians by isolating Arafat. Bush proclaimed, “Peace requires a new and different Palestinian leadership, so that a Palestinian state can be born.” In the same speech, Bush proposed a “road map for peace” that would lead to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in a step-by-step fashion.⁶⁶

While former president Carter supported the limited efforts to restart peace talks in the wake of the September 11 attacks in mid-2002, he criticized the step-by-step formula of the road map, “Israel has been able to use it as a delaying tactic with an endless series of preconditions that can never be met, while proceeding with plans to implement its unilateral goals.”⁶⁷ Reflecting his presidential style that preferred comprehensive plans on issues, Carter sought a wide-ranging peace settlement that forgoes the step-by-step approaches of plans such as the “Road Map for Peace,” programs easily subverted by violence by either side.⁶⁸ Negotiations based on the road map framework progressed slowly or not at all even after Arafat appointed Mahmoud Abbas as prime minister to replace him as the Palestinian representative in the peace talks. In the midst of this deadlock, Carter helped former Israeli and Palestinian

⁶⁶ George W. Bush, “Remarks on the Middle East,” June 24, 2002, in Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, The American Presidency Project [online], <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=73320>.

⁶⁷ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 160.

⁶⁸ Jimmy Carter, “Middle East Accord Offers ‘Best’ Chance for Peace,” *USA Today*, November 3, 2003.

government officials negotiate an informal final status agreement proposal that would settle all the controversial questions of settlements, Jerusalem, and territorial swaps. Neither the Israeli government nor the Palestinian Authority endorsed the resulting Geneva Initiative, but it demonstrated that such an agreement was possible when both sides decided to make difficult concessions.⁶⁹

Upon Arafat's death in November 2004, the Palestinian Authority called upon Carter to help monitor the first election since 1996 to determine Arafat's successor. Like the first elections, the process went smoothly except in East Jerusalem where numerous irregularities occurred. In these polling places, the Israelis permitted no Palestinian observers or election officials, so Israeli officials supervised the voting process. However, issues arose with discrepancies in the voter lists and Israeli clerks prevented practically every Palestinian voter from participating. Carter threatened to call a press conference to reveal the Israeli obstruction. The Israelis bent under the pressure, but turnout remained very low in East Jerusalem while it mirrored 1996 patterns elsewhere.⁷⁰

Mahmoud Abbas, the moderate Fatah candidate and Arafat's natural successor, won the presidential election in a landslide victory. Carter met with Abbas the day after the election to advise him on future peace talks with the Israelis.⁷¹ However, trouble developed for the secular nationalists of the Fatah Party as Hamas wielded increasing

⁶⁹ Jimmy Carter, "The Geneva Initiative: A Promising Foundation for Peace," *Palestine-Israel Journal of Politics, Economics & Culture* 11:2 (2004), 9-11; James Bennet, "Quiet Times in the Mideast Encourage Official and Unofficial Efforts for a Cease-Fire," *New York Times*, December 1, 2003; Ewen MacAskill, "Middle East's unofficial peace," *The Guardian*, December 2, 2003.

⁷⁰ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 171-172.

⁷¹ Greg Myre, "Mandate in Hand, Abbas Declares He's Ready for Talks," *New York Times*, January 11, 2005.

influence due to the corruption among Fatah officials and the lack of improvement in material conditions in PA-controlled areas of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. Hamas boycotted the presidential election protesting the president's job description that required negotiations with Israel. Since Hamas denied Israel's right to exist and wanted an expansive Palestinian state, officials in the organization decided that entering the evolving field of Palestinian politics through the presidency would be inappropriate.⁷²

While Arafat appointed municipal councils to run cities and towns in PA-controlled territory, Abbas opened up municipal government offices to elections, which allowed Hamas to win a series of stunning victories, even winning control in Fatah strongholds. Drawing on almost three decades of experience of participating in elections for professional, student, and labor unions during the Israeli occupation, Hamas successfully appealed to disgruntled Palestinian voters tired of Fatah corruption as well as those who benefitted from the numerous social services, such as kindergartens and clinics, that Hamas provided in local communities.⁷³

Although Hamas boycotted the 1996 elections due to the Oslo Accords, Hamas members participated in the parliamentary elections in January 2006, arguing the events of the past ten years demonstrated their failure.⁷⁴ As in the previous two elections, Carter served as an election observer as part of an international team of monitors. However, the

⁷² Milton-Edwards and Farrell, *Hamas*, 241.

⁷³ Jeroen Gunning, *Hamas in Politics: Democracy, Religion, Violence* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), 144. Hamas receives much of its funding through foreign sources including individuals, businesses, Islamic charitable organizations, and even other Arab states. See Matthew Levitt, *Hamas: Politics, Charity, and Terrorism in the Service of Jihad* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and Sara Roy, *Hamas and Civil Society in Gaza: Engaging the Islamist Social Sector* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).

⁷⁴ Gunning, *Hamas in Politics*, 50-51.

participation of Hamas in the elections created fears among Israelis about the rising Islamist militant group's power and among Fatah party members fearful of losing power. Rumors abounded that the Israelis and Fatah would cancel the elections with Israel prohibiting voting in East Jerusalem and Fatah calling off the entire election in response.⁷⁵

Regardless, the elections proceeded on schedule in an "orderly and peaceful" fashion according to Carter's report, except for the usual complications in East Jerusalem.⁷⁶ While many commentators expected significant gains for Hamas, the organization exceeded expectations and won a majority of the parliamentary seats. Thus it confronted the need to form a cabinet as the governing party. Scholars and journalists attributed the stunning victory to Fatah candidates who ran as independents and took votes away from the official Fatah candidates, as well as to voters' dismay at a decade of rampant corruption among Fatah officials.⁷⁷

After the voting concluded, Carter emphasized that "the elections were completely honest, completely fair, completely safe, and without violence."⁷⁸ Despite fears among Israelis and Fatah party members about the involvement of Hamas, Carter seemed optimistic about their participation as "a demonstration of the commitment of

⁷⁵ Azzan Tamimi, *Hamas: A History From Within*, second edition (Northampton: Olive Branch Press, 2011), 216.

⁷⁶ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 182.

⁷⁷ Milton-Edwards and Farrell, *Hamas*, 259; Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 183.

⁷⁸ Etgar Lefkovits, "Carter: Keep international aid flowing to 'destitute' PA. Former US president: 'Elections were honest, fair, safe, and without violence,'" *The Jerusalem Post*, January 27, 2006.

most Palestinians to democracy...My hope is that this will moderate their position and lead to their transformation to a non-violent organization.”⁷⁹

Hamas, however, had few opportunities to moderate its positions after an international boycott of Hamas arose due to its previous statements refusing to recognize Israel’s right to exist and its coordination of suicide bombings in the second intifada. On behalf of Palestinians living in the territories, Carter urged the international community not to boycott or to at least provide food and needed aid through NGOs and UN agencies, fearing a humanitarian disaster.⁸⁰ Carter argued that the Palestinian people voted to have a two-party democracy instead of a one-party Fatah-run state to cut down on corruption, not to escalate tensions.⁸¹ He also cited polling data that showed only 1 percent of Palestinians voted for Hamas to implement Islamic law in the territories.⁸² Carter prophetically warned that isolating the new Hamas government would “alienate the already oppressed and innocent Palestinians, to incite violence, and to increase the domestic influence and international esteem of Hamas. It will certainly not be an inducement to Hamas or other militants to moderate their policies.”⁸³ As Carter predicted,

⁷⁹ Calev Ben-David, “What Carter has helped to create, here and elsewhere. Little good can be expected to emerge from the ex-president’s meeting with Mashaal,” *The Jerusalem Post*, April 14, 2008.

⁸⁰ Etgar Lefkovits, “Carter: Keep international aid flowing to ‘destitute’ PA. Former US president: ‘Elections were honest, fair, safe, and without violence,’” *The Jerusalem Post*, January 27, 2006.

⁸¹ Jimmy Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land: A Plan That Will Work* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), 86.

⁸² Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 185.

⁸³ Jimmy Carter, “Don’t Punish the Palestinians,” *Washington Post*, February 20, 2006.

the Hamas government turned to Iran and Hezbollah for money, supplies, and arms because it had few options due to its isolation by the international community.⁸⁴

Following the 2006 elections that resulted in Hamas taking control, Carter established a permanent presence in the occupied territories with an office for his Carter Center in Ramallah.⁸⁵ Carter focused even more on working with the Palestinians through this new office because his influence and credibility with the Israelis continued to diminish because of his friendship with Arafat and his encouragement of Hamas to participate in the 2006 elections. Carter and his associates even attempted to teach the concept of nonviolence to the leaders of Hamas based on the experiences of Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King Jr. However, Hamas rebuffed these efforts toward nonviolence, claiming that Israel would respond violently and continue to build new settlements.⁸⁶

Carter's observations of life in the occupied territories during his time monitoring the 2005 presidential election and 2006 parliamentary elections led him to conclude that "it's almost a miracle that the Palestinians have been able to orchestrate three elections during the past 10 years, all of which have been honest, fair, strongly contested, without violence, and with the results accepted by winners and losers."⁸⁷ To push his own proposed solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and report on the conditions he observed in the occupied territories during his time as an election monitor in 2005 and

⁸⁴ Milton-Edwards and Farrell, *Hamas*, 133, 225; Norton, *Hezbollah*, 133.

⁸⁵ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 89.

⁸⁶ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 144.

⁸⁷ Jimmy Carter, "Punishing Innocent Palestinians is a Crime," *International Herald Tribune*, May 7, 2006.

2006, Carter wrote *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, his first book on the Middle East since the publication of *The Blood of Abraham* twenty years earlier.⁸⁸

While the first half of the book primarily recaps his earlier work, the new parts of the book proved very provocative. In essence, the former president argues in *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* that,

In this diplomatic vacuum, Israeli leaders have embarked on a series of unilateral decisions, bypassing both Washington and the Palestinians. Their presumption is that an encircling barrier will finally resolve the Palestinian problem. Utilizing their political and military dominance, they are imposing a system of partial withdrawal, encapsulation, and apartheid on the Muslim and Christian citizens of the occupied territories. The driving purpose for the forced separation of the two peoples is unlike that in South Africa—not racism, but the acquisition of land.⁸⁹

In the book, Carter highlighted his first visit in 1973 as governor of Georgia as well as his most recent trips to observe the Palestinian elections in 2006. From his travels over the years, Carter observed that Palestinians faced increasing oppression in the West Bank and Gaza under Israeli rule.⁹⁰ To resolve the conflict, Carter called on Israel to comply with international law (citing UN Resolutions 242 and 338 as the most prominent examples)

⁸⁸ Whereas Carter clearly recognized Kenneth Stein as a co-author of *The Blood of Abraham* in the book's acknowledgments, he does not name an explicit co-author for *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. However, in the book's acknowledgements, Carter thanks Steve Hochman, Director of Research at the Carter Center, for his assistance in helping him check the book for errors.

⁸⁹ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 189-190.

⁹⁰ In *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, Carter provides a chronological description of his personal involvement in the region from 1973-2006. Some of the most important changes occurring in this period that contribute to worsened conditions for Palestinians in the territories include the increasing number of Israeli settlements in Gaza and the West Bank, the rise of mass violence in the first (1987-1993) and second (2000-2005) Palestinian intifadas, and the establishment of the Palestinian Authority in the territories after the signing of the Oslo Accords. For the early history of the settlement movement, see Gershom Gorenberg, *The Accidental Empire: Israel and the Birth of the Settlements, 1967-1977* (New York: Times Books, 2006). For a history of the broader intifada period, see David Pratt, *Intifada: The Long Day of Rage* (Havertown: Casemate Publishers, 2006). For a Palestinian perspective of the second intifada, see Ramzy Baroud, *The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronicle of a People's Struggle* (Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, 2006).

and accept its pre-1967 borders as the foundation for a two-state solution. Furthermore, he emphatically stated that to be an impartial mediator, the United States must take a more active role in discouraging the construction of any additional Israeli settlements in the West Bank.⁹¹

In *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, Carter placed almost the entire burden of responsibility squarely on Israel to solve this intractable conflict, claiming that the important decisions about the negotiations over the land “will be made in Jerusalem, through democratic processes involving all Israelis who can express their views and elect their leaders.”⁹² Many of his remarks in the book drew on earlier statements where he focused his attention on the question of settlements, noting that the Israeli decision to dismantle settlements on the Sinai peninsula helped the success of the Camp David Accords.⁹³ Carter lamented his own failure to secure in writing Begin’s verbal commitment to freeze Israeli settlement activity in the occupied territories during future peace talks. In retrospect, he believes that,

For Menachem Begin, the peace treaty with Egypt was the significant act for Israel, while solemn promises regarding the West Bank and Palestinians would be finessed or deliberately violated. With the bilateral treaty, Israel removed Egypt’s considerable strength from the military equation of the Middle East and thus it permitted itself renewed freedom to pursue the goals of a fervent and dedicated minority of its citizens to confiscate, settle, and fortify the occupied territories.⁹⁴

⁹¹ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 216.

⁹² Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 69.

⁹³ Jimmy Carter, “For Israel, Land or Peace,” *The Washington Post*, November 26, 2000.

⁹⁴ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 50-52; on the issue of the settlement freeze in the Camp David Accords, also see Jimmy Carter, “Camp David Accords: Jimmy Carter Reflects 25 Years Later,” Speech in Washington DC, September 17, 2003. <http://cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc1482.html>

Throughout *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, Carter pointed to the settlement issue as an obstacle to negotiations because the Israelis took such severe measures to protect their settlers from terrorism. Carter highlighted Palestinians living in territories cut up by roads accessible only to Israelis and security fences. He denounced the Israelis for denying Palestinians freedom of movement and prohibiting Palestinian goods from entering Israel or crossing the border into Jordan. The Plains Sunday school teacher even put the situation in the occupied territories in theological terms:

It became increasingly clear that there were two Israels. One encompassed the ancient culture and moral values of the Jewish people, defined by the Hebrew Scriptures with which I had been familiar since childhood and representing the young nation that most Americans envisioned. The other existed within the occupied Palestinian territories, with policies shaped by a refusal to acknowledge and respect the basic human rights of the citizens.⁹⁵

The theological critiques of Israel in *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* also stretch back to Carter's interaction with Israel dating back to 1973. Carter again highlighted the story of his encounter with Meir on his 1973 trip to Israel and his reminder to her that the Israelites faced great trials when they proved unfaithful to God.⁹⁶

Recalling the brutal regime of racial segregation in South Africa as well as his own experiences of growing up in the Jim Crow South, the book's title quickly became the primary flashpoint of controversy. The former president claimed that the provocative title sought to rouse debate in the United States over the Israeli-Palestinian conflict because of the "extraordinary lobbying efforts of the American-Israel Political Action

⁹⁵ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 112.

⁹⁶ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 31-32.

Committee” to stifle any criticism of Israeli policy, a position also held by some scholars including John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt.⁹⁷

However, the publication of *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* was not the first time that he considered the apartheid analogy. In *The Blood of Abraham*, Carter quoted an Israeli Peace Now activist who accused Israel of apartheid during an interview. In their conversation, the activist stated, “I am afraid that we are moving toward a government like that of South Africa, with a dual society of Jewish rulers and Arab subjects with few rights of citizenship. The West Bank is not worth it.”⁹⁸

The book’s controversial title and Carter’s willingness to identify Israel as the primary obstacle to peace in the Middle East quickly came under fire from critics, ranging from Jewish hardliners such as Alan Dershowitz to former Clinton administration Middle East envoy Dennis Ross, who cited factual errors in the book, accused Carter of potential plagiarism, and even called the former president anti-Semitic.⁹⁹ Critics attacked one of the central premises of Carter’s plan for peace: that UN Resolution 242 (1967) stipulated that the boundaries from the 1949 armistice served as the legal boundaries of the State of Israel. Instead, they argued that Resolution 242 called for the negotiation of any permanent boundaries between Israel and its Arab neighbors. Critics claimed that Arab states have consistently rejected potential Israeli territorial concessions.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Jimmy Carter, “How I See Palestine,” *Los Angeles Times*, December 8, 2006; see John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, *The Israel Lobby and US Foreign Policy*, (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007).

⁹⁸ Jimmy Carter, *The Blood of Abraham*, 50.

⁹⁹ Dennis Ross, “Don’t Play with Maps,” *New York Times*, January 9, 2007.

¹⁰⁰ CAMERA, *Bearing False Witness*, 2.

Furthermore, scholars and commentators have criticized *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* for not providing a full explanation of the apartheid comparison and for generally being poorly written and lacking in analytical nuance.¹⁰¹ According to them, some of the differences between Israel and South Africa include claims that the Palestinian leaders deserve blame for the oppression of their own people and the lack of a Palestinian equivalent of Nelson Mandela.¹⁰² Five years after the book's publication, several Jewish readers filed a lawsuit against Carter and the book's publisher for disseminating false information about Israel.¹⁰³

The critics focused on one particular sentence in the book: "It is imperative that the general Arab community and all significant Palestinian groups make it clear that they will end the suicide bombings and other acts of terrorism," Carter wrote, "when international laws and the ultimate goals of the Roadmap for Peace are accepted by Israel."¹⁰⁴ They argue the statement accepts that Palestinians have a legitimate right to continue acts of violence against Israelis until the Israeli government accepts a pro-Palestinian interpretation of international law such as UN Resolution 242.¹⁰⁵ Such an impression frightens many in the Jewish community, especially the hardliners, who are

¹⁰¹ Sneh, *The Future Almost Arrived*, 190; Richard Schifter, Book Review: *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, *Mediterranean Quarterly* 18:2 (Spring 2007), 136-141; Jeremy Pressman, "Book Review: *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*," *Peace Review: A Journal of Social Justice* 19:3 (July-September 2007), 465-469; Kenneth Stein, "My Problem with Jimmy Carter's Book," *Middle East Quarterly* 14:2 (Spring 2007), 3-15.

¹⁰² Samuel Bahn, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, January 27, 2007; Michael Kinsley, "It's Not Apartheid—Carter Adds to the List of Mideast Misjudgments," *Washington Post*, December 12, 2006.

¹⁰³ Jordana Horn, "Jimmy Carter being sued for alleged falsehoods in one of his books on Israel," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 3, 2011.

¹⁰⁴ Carter, *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, 213.

¹⁰⁵ CAMERA, *Bearing False Witness*, 52.

very sensitive to threats of violence and refusing Israel's right to exist due to the massive psychological impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish consciousness. One of the leading scholars and activists on the Holocaust, Deborah Lipstadt, explains, "When an Ahmadinejad or Hamas threatens to destroy Israel, Jews have historical precedent to believe them. Jimmy Carter either does not understand this or considers it irrelevant."¹⁰⁶ In a speech to the Zionist Federation in London, Lipstadt continued her Holocaust-related criticism of Carter, "When a former president of the United States writes a book on the Israeli-Palestinian crisis and writes a chronology at the beginning of the book in order to help them understand the emergence of the situation and in that chronology lists nothing of importance between 1939 and 1947, that is soft-core denial."¹⁰⁷

Carter's perceived insensitivity to the Holocaust and prior Jewish oppression led some critics to call him anti-Semitic. In an article in the *Jerusalem Post*, David Forman, founder of Rabbis for Human Rights, explains several definitions of anti-Semitism in relation to the state of Israel:

if you erase Israel's modern historical narrative thereby denying Israel's right to exist; if you hold Israel responsible for the unrest in the entire Middle East; if you accuse Israel of fostering dual loyalties among American Jews to the extent that their support for Israel is perceived as undermining the security and well-being of the United States; and if you do not judge Israel by universal standards of moral behavior and political conduct.¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Deborah Lipstadt, "Jimmy Carter's Jewish Problem," *Washington Post*, January 20, 2007. However, Lipstadt overlooks that Carter established the President's Commission on the Holocaust in 1978 to ensure Americans would not forget the tragedy of the Holocaust and appointed Elie Wiesel to oversee the creation of what would become the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum.

¹⁰⁷ Jonny Paul, "Holocaust scholar warns of new 'soft-core' denial," *The Jerusalem Post*, February 6, 2007.

¹⁰⁸ David Forman, "What Christians need to know," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 21, 2007.

According to Forman's definition, Carter was anti-Semitic under the second and fourth criteria he identifies because Carter places a lot of responsibility for the conflict on the Israelis and because his religious background leads him to hold Israel to different biblical standards. Some commentators have noted that Carter seems to have a "religious problem" with Israel because it is "not the reincarnation of ancient Judea but a modern, largely temporal democracy."¹⁰⁹ Journalist Jeffrey Goldberg accused the former president of treating the modern state of Israel as "a lineal descendant of the Pharisees" who mistreat the neighboring Palestinians as poorly or worse as the first century Jewish Pharisees treated the Samaritans of the New Testament.¹¹⁰ Columnist Samuel Freedman recalled the story Carter first told in *The Blood of Abraham* where "the scolding holier-than-thou Carter, the one who took it upon himself to instruct Golda Meir in Old Testament theology" illustrated the former president's tendency to set moral standards for the state of Israel that differ greatly from the criteria set for any other ethnic group or community seeking national self-determination.¹¹¹

Many critics addressed the issue of Carter's supposed anti-Semitism. Alan Dershowitz wrote that "Carter frowns upon Israel's liberal, tolerant society; it falls short of his biblical ideal" and that "he cannot accept contemporary Israel or Israeli Jews for what they are."¹¹² Abraham Foxman, president of the Anti-Defamation League, feared

¹⁰⁹ CAMERA, *Bearing False Witness*, 73.

¹¹⁰ Jeffrey Goldberg, "What Would Jimmy Do? A former president puts the onus for resolving the Mideast conflict on the Israelis," *Washington Post*, December 10, 2006.

¹¹¹ Samuel Freedman, "Carter and the Christians," *The Jerusalem Post*, January 26, 2007.

¹¹² Alan Dershowitz, *The Case Against Israel's Enemies: Exposing Jimmy Carter and Others Who Stand in the Way of Peace* (Hoboken: John Wiley & Sons Inc, 2008), 39-40.

that Carter's use of loaded terms like apartheid, references to the power of the Israeli lobby, and accusations of Jewish control of the media all contributed to anti-Semitic conspiracy theories similar to the ones that fueled the Holocaust.¹¹³ In rather blunt terms, *Jerusalem Post* columnist Shmuley Boteach clarified that "Jimmy Carter is not so much anti-Semite as anti-intellectual, not so much a Jew-hater as a boor. The real explanation behind his limitless hostility to Israel is a total lack of any moral understanding...He is, and always has been, a man of good intentions bereft of good judgment."¹¹⁴

Jewish critics of Carter also pointed out that the former president lacks impartiality in evaluating the conflict because the Carter Center received so many Arab donations.¹¹⁵ Furthermore, they have noted Carter's hypocrisy in criticizing human rights abuses in Gaza and the West Bank while he remains relatively silent on abuses in Arab countries.¹¹⁶ Carter acknowledged the financial support from Arabs and remains very transparent about his fundraising. In fact, Carter frequently noted in his trip reports to the Middle East that he sought to raise funds for the Guinea worm eradication program in Africa and raised millions of dollars in the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and elsewhere in the Middle East.¹¹⁷ In a 2009 meeting with Knesset leaders, one of the MKs

¹¹³ Abraham Foxman, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, January 28, 2007.

¹¹⁴ Shmuley Boteach, "Why Jimmy Carter is not an anti-Semite," *The Jerusalem Post*, December 27, 2006.

¹¹⁵ A list of donors to the Carter Center is available at <http://www.cartercenter.org/donate/partners/index.html>. Arab donors include governments (Oman, United Arab Emirates) and various Arab charitable foundations.

¹¹⁶ CAMERA, *Bearing False Witness*, 3, 91.

¹¹⁷ Trip Report by Former US President Jimmy Carter to Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Dubai, Oman, Egypt, Jordan, and Turkey, Oct 18-30, 2009. November 2, 2009. http://cartercenter.org/news/trip_reports/saudi-arabia-101809.html; United Arab Emirates, April 20, 2001 <http://cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc447.html> ; Oman and Abu Dhabi Trip Report, November 22, 1998. <http://cartercenter.org/news/documents/doc29.html>

accused Carter “of being an agent of Arab states” because he had so many Arab donors for the Carter Center, but Carter shrugged off the accusation, noting that the number of American Jewish donors outnumbered Arab donors.¹¹⁸

The book’s controversial claims of Jewish control of the media and politics as well as interpretations of UN resolutions that seemed pro-Palestinian prompted the resignation of Kenneth Stein as a Carter Center Middle East fellow as well as the departure of many Jewish members of the Carter Center’s advisory board.¹¹⁹ Stein, the first executive director of the Carter Center, collaborated with Carter in writing *The Blood of Abraham* in 1985.¹²⁰ Recalling that collaboration, Stein explained that the former president never considered the longstanding forces of history, culture, religion, and ideology as major obstacles to his ability to negotiate a pragmatic and comprehensive settlement to the problem. Stein remembered frequently arguing with Carter over how much history to include in each chapter and over word choice and specific claims. After one particular heated argument, Carter reminded the Emory history professor, “Remember Ken, only one of us was president of the United States.”¹²¹ Other scholars echoed Stein’s complaints of Carter’s ahistorical writing style, claiming that Carter does

¹¹⁸ Rebecca Anna Stoil and Tori Cheifetz, “Carter: Netanyahu created ‘obstacles to peace’ in speech. Former US president says that half of settlers could remain where they are in final status agreement,” *The Jerusalem Post*, June 16, 2009.

¹¹⁹ Brenda Goodman, “Advisers Quit Carter Center to Protest Mideast Book,” *New York Times*, January 12, 2007.

¹²⁰ Brenda Goodman and Julie Bosman, “Former Aide Parts with Carter Over Book,” *New York Times*, December 7, 2006; Leading Carter historian Douglas Brinkley claims that Stein “feels snubbed he wasn’t given any kind of acknowledgement for the work he’s done with Carter. It’s a bit of bruised ego and philosophical difference being displayed in public here.”

¹²¹ CAMERA, *Bearing False Witness*, 43.

not understand the “much older and more complicated” roots of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.¹²²

Commentators have explained that Carter is generally naïve about the Middle East crisis because “behind conflicts he sees not real political differences but failures of negotiations.”¹²³ In his review of the book, the *New York Times* bureau chief in Jerusalem, Ethan Bronner, slammed Carter for a “Rip Van Winkle feel” to the book for not recognizing changes in the Middle East since his presidency such as the rise of al Qaeda, Iranian nuclear ambitions, and the rise of the Taliban in the Afghanistan. Moreover, according to Bronner’s review, Carter failed to recognize how changes in the region at the end of his presidency such as the Iranian revolution, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, and Saddam Hussein’s assumption of the presidency in Iraq, complicated the Middle East peace process and contributed as much to regional instability as Israeli policies toward the occupied territories.¹²⁴

Other detractors argued that Carter wrote *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* not just to alter perceptions among policymakers and the general public, but also to change the minds of American evangelicals about their firm support of Israel. They accused Carter of not only using his credentials as a former president, but also using the respect he garners as a devout Christian as an asset in appealing to the evangelical community.¹²⁵ Jeffery Goldberg accused Carter of trying to “scare” evangelicals out of their allegiance

¹²² Sneh, *The Future Almost Arrived*, 190.

¹²³ Richard Greenberg, “Good Jimmy, Bad Jimmy—The former president reminds us of his accomplishments since leaving office,” *Washington Post*, October 14, 2007.

¹²⁴ Ethan Bronner, “Jews, Arabs, and Jimmy Carter,” *New York Times*, January 7, 2007.

¹²⁵ CAMERA, *Bearing False Witness*, 77.

to the Jewish state by making “specious” allegations against Israel’s conduct of the occupation in the Gaza Strip and West Bank.¹²⁶ Even though Carter failed to share a pre-millennial dispensationalist eschatology in his evangelical Christianity, it seemed to some Jewish observers that Carter “regards the Jewish homeland as contingent on the faithfulness of its people and leaders to the rules that come with God’s promise of land outlined in the Hebrew scriptures.”¹²⁷ However, if these critics were correct and Carter’s goal was to change evangelical minds about Israel, the book ultimately failed because conservative evangelicals and fundamentalists remained steadfast in their support of Israel while mainline Protestants and progressive evangelicals continued their advocacy of Palestinian human rights.¹²⁸

Even though the critics dominated much of the discussion, Carter had a few supporters such as longtime political ally and *Christian Century* editor James Wall, former National Security Council staffer William Quandt, and a number of academics tired of any criticism of Israel being labeled as anti-Semitic.¹²⁹ In a letter to the editor, journalist Geoffrey Gray noted that the apartheid analogy is “commonplace among

¹²⁶ Jeffrey Goldberg, “What Would Jimmy Do? A former president puts the onus for resolving the Mideast conflict on the Israelis,” *Washington Post*, December 10, 2006.

¹²⁷ CAMERA, *Bearing False Witness*, 79.

¹²⁸ For the conservative view, see David Aikman, “Throwing Rocks at Israel,” *Christianity Today*, April 2007, 82; For the mainline view, see James M. Wall, “Apartheid Denial,” *Christian Century*, February 20, 2007, 68; For the progressive evangelical view, see Charles Kimball, “Road Maps to Peace—or Destruction?” *Sojourners Magazine*, April 2007, 52.

¹²⁹ James M. Wall, “Inquisitive president,” *Christian Century*, December 26, 2006, 53; William B. Quandt, “Palestine, Apartheid, and Jimmy Carter: Reading Past the Title,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 36:3 (Spring 2007), 89-93; Jerome Slater, Book Review: *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, *Political Science Quarterly* 122:3 (Fall 2007), 484-485; A.J. Abraham, “Book Review: *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*,” *Journal of Third World Studies* 25:2 (Fall 2008), 261-263.

informed commentators,” even in Israel.¹³⁰ Philosophy professor John Berteaux believed that Carter did not go far enough in his book, arguing that Israel’s restrictions on Palestinians in the territories actually represented a “web of racial projects, which are an obstacle in the path of peace.”¹³¹ Chris Hedges, a senior fellow at The Nation Institute, echoed the sentiment that Carter soft-pedaled his criticism of Israel, “if there is a failing in Carter’s stance, it is that he is too kind to the Israelis, bending over backward to assert that he is only writing about the occupied territories.”¹³² Zbigniew Brzezinski, Carter’s national security advisor, agreed with his former boss’s general assessment of the region and denounced the “objectionable” media campaign that he believed was “designed to intimidate an open public discussion” of the situation.¹³³ Carter Center advisor Robert Pastor and former Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Harold Saunders publicly supported Carter, fielding questions in venues with largely Jewish audiences.¹³⁴

Not surprisingly, many of the book’s defenders were of Palestinian or Arab descent. Arab-American columnist George Hishmeh praised Carter’s book because it showed the other side of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the United States, where the Israeli voice is dominant.¹³⁵ Palestinian-American journalist Ali Abunimah lauded Carter’s courage for providing a voice for the dignity of Palestinians while listing a series

¹³⁰ Geoffrey Gray, “Letter to the Editor,” *New York Times*, January 28, 2007.

¹³¹ John Berteaux, “Review: *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*,” *Journal of Religion, Conflict, and Peace* 2:1 (Fall 2008), <http://www.religionconflictpeace.org/node/46>.

¹³² Chris Hedges, “Get Carter,” *Nation*, January 8, 2007.

¹³³ “Ask the expert: US policy in the Middle East,” *Financial Times of London*, December 4, 2006.

¹³⁴ Jamal Najjab, “Is Jimmy Carter an Anti-Semite?” *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 26:3 (April 2007), 68-69.

¹³⁵ George Hishmeh, “Bush and Olmert are good at talking,” *Gulf News*, November 30, 2006.

of Israeli discriminatory measures in the territories.¹³⁶ Saree Makdisi, an English professor of Palestinian and Lebanese ancestry, attacked Carter's detractors for "defending the indefensible."¹³⁷

Even some Jewish commentators praised Carter's book, fondly remembering the former president's negotiation of the Camp David Accords and admitting some of the harsh realities of Palestinian life in the West Bank and Gaza. While uncomfortable with the term "apartheid" to describe the current conditions in the territories, Knesset member Yossi Beilin agreed with Carter that apartheid might be in Israel's future unless they achieve a lasting peace agreement with the Palestinians.¹³⁸ Rabbi Michael Lerner commended Carter for "doing a great service to the Jews" while attacking the extremism among the president's critics and the preponderant influence of the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (AIPAC) in American politics.¹³⁹ Jewish-American journalist Henry Siegman also came to Carter's defense, decrying the "pettiness" of Dershowitz and the book's other critics.¹⁴⁰

Carter also defended himself by clarifying his argument and claiming that he applied the term apartheid only to the Palestinians of the occupied territories, not the Palestinians within Israel. Moreover, the acquisition of land rather than race drove the

¹³⁶ Ali Abunimah, "...And a Palestinian One," *Wall Street Journal*, December 26, 2006.

¹³⁷ Saree Makdisi, "On the New Book 'Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid,'" *San Francisco Chronicle*, December 20, 2006.

¹³⁸ Yossi Beilin, "Carter is no more critical of Israel than Israelis themselves," *The Jewish Daily Forward*, January 19, 2007.

¹³⁹ Michael Lerner, "Thank You, Jimmy Carter," December 6, 2006, http://www.tompaine.com/articles/2006/12/06/thank_you_jimmy_carter.php.

¹⁴⁰ Henry Siegman, "Hurricane Carter," *The Nation*, January 22, 2007.

apartheid in the occupied territories.¹⁴¹ Even commentators within Israel such as the editorial board of *Ha'aretz*, one of Israel's leading newspapers, used the apartheid comparison themselves, citing instances of Palestinians being deprived of basic human rights, such as the freedom of movement. Carter acknowledged this as well, stating "[Israelis] have all used and explained the word 'apartheid' in much harsher words than mine."¹⁴² On several occasions, Carter speculated that most Americans agreed with him as well as many Jews.¹⁴³ During the book tour, he met with Jewish rabbis on a number of stops to discuss the book and even prayed with some rabbis after a book signing in Phoenix.¹⁴⁴ However, Carter expressed regret for the controversy he caused by introducing the debate over the term apartheid because it took any potential attention away from the "almost nonexistent discussion of the Palestinian issue" in the United States.¹⁴⁵

To mend relations with the American Jewish community, Carter spoke at Brandeis University to explain his position. He urged the Brandeis students to visit the occupied territories and see the conditions for themselves. The former president remained steadfast regarding his use of the word apartheid, asserting that prominent South African leaders (and former victims of the apartheid regime) such as Nelson Mandela and

¹⁴¹ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, xxii-xxiii.

¹⁴² Michael Ben-Yair, "The war's seventh day," *Ha'aretz*, March 3, 2002; Geoffrey Gray, "Letter to the Editor," *New York Times*, January 28, 2007; Michael Powell, "Jimmy Carter's 'Peace' Mission to Brandeis—Ex-President Still Stands by His Controversial Palestine Book," *Washington Post*, January 24, 2007.

¹⁴³ "Carter says most Americans agree with him on Israel," *Tehran Times*, February 25, 2007.

¹⁴⁴ Julie Bosman, "Carter View of Israel 'Apartheid' Stirs Furor," *New York Times*, December 14, 2006.

¹⁴⁵ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, xxiii-xxiv.

Archbishop Desmond Tutu had observed the conditions in Gaza and the West Bank and employed the same terms. Furthermore, he explained, somewhat condescendingly, that Israel's most ardent supporters in the United States came from among "Christians like me who have been taught since I was three years old to honor and protect God's chosen people from among whom came our own Christian savior, Jesus Christ." In his Brandeis speech, Carter also cited the number of times Old Testament writers used the words "justice" and "righteousness" to support his plan for the Middle East peace process.¹⁴⁶ Dershowitz accused the former president of being disingenuous, claiming the "talk at Brandeis bore little resemblance to his book and to his many television and radio interviews. It was conciliatory in tone and compromising in substance. It had all the hallmarks of having been drafted by Stuart Eizenstat [Carter's former domestic policy advisor and an American Jew]."¹⁴⁷

In the midst of the storm surrounding *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, Carter found himself embroiled in more controversy over his decision to meet with Khaled Mashaal, leader of the Hamas political bureau in Damascus. Carter joined with other distinguished former international leaders such as Kofi Annan, Nelson Mandela, Mary Robinson, and Desmond Tutu in The Elders, an organization dedicated to push for

¹⁴⁶ Jimmy Carter, "Remarks at Brandeis University," January 23, 2007.
http://cartercenter.org/news/editorials_speeches/brandeis.html

¹⁴⁷ Alan Dershowitz, *The Case Against Israel's Enemies*, 21; I could not find evidence to corroborate Dershowitz's accusation, but Eizenstat was serving on the Brandeis Board of Trustees at the time of the Carter speech, so it is possible. Eizenstat also debated Anti-Defamation League President Abraham Foxman over a variety of issues including Carter's book and anti-Semitic jokes in the film *Borat*. While Eizenstat declared "there are many more important issues" to debate other than Carter's book, he argued that Foxman's psychological analysis of Carter's anti-Semitism was "dead wrong." Michal Lando, "Debating anti-Semitism in the shadow of Walt, Mearsheimer...and Borat. ADL's Foxman, ex-Carter adviser Eizenstat spar over the issue in showdown," *The Jerusalem Post*, September 10, 2007.

resolution and reconciliation in global conflicts. The Elders planned a Middle East trip to meet with the major parties involved in the conflict, but Israeli leaders claimed they had no time due to the sixtieth birthday celebration of the State of Israel.¹⁴⁸

However, Carter decided to travel to Israel anyway under the auspices of the Carter Center. His memory of the failure to meet with Arafat during his administration heavily influenced Carter's quest to act as a backchannel contact with Hamas for the United States and Israel.¹⁴⁹ The former president wanted to assess Hamas' willingness to negotiate, urge them to reject violence against Israeli civilians, and convince them to form a coalition government with Fatah. Continuing his tradition of requesting freedom for political prisoners and unjustly imprisoned individuals, Carter asked Hamas to free kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Carter defended his decision to meet with the Hamas leader, "I think there's no doubt in anyone's mind that, if Israel is ever going to find peace with justice concerning the relationship of their next-door neighbors, the Palestinians, that Hamas will have to be included in the process."¹⁵⁰

Most high-ranking Israeli officials, including Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, refused to meet with Carter because they feared his meeting with Hamas would help legitimize the organization. They were also apprehensive that a Carter-Olmert meeting would indicate that Carter was serving as a third-party mediator for secret negotiations

¹⁴⁸ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 94-97, 117-118.

¹⁴⁹ Tovah Lazaroff, "Carter: Hamas, Syria must be brought into peace process, US should talk to Iran. Ex-president meets with Yossi Beilin, visits Sderot," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 15, 2008.

¹⁵⁰ Herb Keinon and Tovah Lazaroff, "Peres to Carter: Mashaal meeting 'severe mistake.' Schalits ask former US president to use influence to help Gilad," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 14, 2008.

between Hamas and Israel.¹⁵¹ Even Fatah officials in the West Bank worried that Carter's meeting with Hamas might hurt Abbas's credibility with the Palestinian people and his efforts to negotiate with Israel.¹⁵²

After Carter met with Mashaal in Damascus, he announced that Hamas would consider a peace deal as long as Palestinians had a chance to vote on the agreement in a referendum.¹⁵³ However, just as the Israelis and Fatah officials feared, Hamas spokesmen touted their meeting with Carter as a sign of their legitimacy as representatives of the Palestinian people. Moreover, they stressed that a peace deal approved in a referendum did not "mean that Hamas is going to accept the result of the referendum."¹⁵⁴

To answer his critics and report on the developments in the region since the publication of *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*, Carter wrote *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land: A Plan That Will Work*. Instead of easing problems, it only provided new fodder for Carter's most vehement critics and did not silence accusations of anti-Semitism. Echoing his Christian Zionist declarations during the 1976 presidential election, Carter affirmed in this book that "this homeland for the Jews was compatible with the teachings of the Bible" and that "Jewish survivors of the Holocaust deserved their own nation."¹⁵⁵ He also explained that Israel's unilateral withdrawal from the Gaza

¹⁵¹ Tovah Lazaroff, "Kadima MK: Olmert's rebuff of Carter was not personal," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 17, 2008; Herb Keinon, "Why Israel snubbed Carter," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 16, 2008.

¹⁵² Khaled Abu Toameh, "PA to Carter: Don't meet Mashaal," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 16, 2008.

¹⁵³ "Hamas open to peace deal, says Carter," *Turkish Daily News*, April 22, 2008.

¹⁵⁴ Khaled Abu Toameh, "Carter confers with Mashaal, Assad. Hamas pleased with talks, claim they confer 'recognition,'" *The Jerusalem Post*, April 21, 2008; Herb Keinon, "Carter—there he goes again," *The Jerusalem Post*, April 22, 2008.

¹⁵⁵ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 13.

Strip resulted in the land's limited religious or strategic value. Carter described Gaza's control in ancient times by the Philistines as part of the reason why Sharon willingly dismantled Israeli settlements in the Gaza Strip.¹⁵⁶

Carter's "plan that will work" only rehashed his previous proposals of Israel returning to its pre-1967 borders with some adjustments to account for new demographic realities. Carter's conclusion about the consequences of not moving forward on a peace process revolving around a two-state solution represented the most important difference in this new book from *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid*. He argued that eventually Palestinians would accept being second-class citizens in Israel in a one-state solution rather than continue living in an occupation-style setting in the West Bank or in an impoverished community cut off from the rest of the world in Gaza. Carter called the single-state outcome unacceptable because world opinion would not tolerate Palestinians being treated as second-class citizens in Israel when they would eventually form the majority of the population (and voters). Such a result would lead to "either the end of a Jewish state or the legal deprivation of voting rights among second-class Palestinians."¹⁵⁷ Nathan Stock, assistant director of the Conflict Resolution Program at the Carter Center, confirmed Carter's assessment of the need to move forward in the peace process because further delays likely ensured additional radicalization of the Palestinian population, like

¹⁵⁶ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 77-78.

¹⁵⁷ Carter, *We Can Have Peace in the Holy Land*, 160-162.

the emergence of Hamas from the Israeli refusal to negotiate with the PLO in the 1980s.¹⁵⁸

Many of the book's critics rehashed their complaints about *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* while others such as Dershowitz and Stein did not bother to respond as vociferously as they had to his previous book. Some resorted to vicious *ad hominem* attacks. One detractor described the book as "a tedious and depressing political diary of an elderly man who can't quite remember where and when he misplaced his clout" and one that "may well have more errors and inaccuracies than pages."¹⁵⁹ Another opponent called the book "what a golfer might call a mulligan—a do-over of his 2006 book."¹⁶⁰

Even non-Jewish critics piled on. Self-proclaimed Middle East expert and Christian Zionist Mike Evans, a writer who connects end times prophecy to modern Middle East politics, claimed that Carter did not "understand the prophetic implications of the strategy he is trying to impose on Israel."¹⁶¹ In a review for *The Jerusalem Post*, Evans avoided his usual prophecy language and ventured into offering more secular political commentary according to a very pro-Israeli version of events. He accused Carter of only applying the term "radical" to Israelis while lavishing praise on "peace-loving organizations such as Hizbullah and Hamas and states like Iran and Syria."¹⁶²

¹⁵⁸ Nathan Stock, "Talk to Hamas now or fight new radicals indefinitely," *The Christian Science Monitor*, October 9, 2009.

¹⁵⁹ Jonathan Schanzer, "Unwelcome back Carter," *The Jerusalem Post*, March 13, 2009.

¹⁶⁰ Andrew Silow-Carroll, "Carter takes a mulligan," *New Jersey Jewish News*, February 5, 2009.

¹⁶¹ Mike Evans, *Jimmy Carter, the Liberal Left, and World Chaos: A Carter/Obama Plan That Will Not Work* (Phoenix: Time Worthy Books, 2009), 414.

¹⁶² Michael D. Evans, "Jimmy Carter, we can heave peace (without you) in the Holy Land," *The Jerusalem Post*, August 26, 2009; Evans's accusation about Carter's use of the word "radical" is untrue. Carter uses the word three times, once referring to Sadat meeting with radical Arab leaders (p.36), identifying Begin as

In a departure from the other critics, former Lebanese presidential candidate Chibli Mallat took Carter to task about his pessimism about a single state and his insistence on a two-state solution, “How can dividing the land be preferable to a state of equality and civil rights?” Mallat extolled a future nonviolent quest for civil rights in a single state in the mode of Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King Jr., and Nelson Mandela.¹⁶³

After the controversy over his books and his meeting with Hamas leaders, Carter’s credibility with Israelis and many in the American Jewish community dissipated. As president, Carter was more cautious in his statements and actions toward the Middle East due to the considerable political influence of American Jews in the Democratic Party. After leaving office, Carter became less cautious and increasingly bold with his comments about the peace process not because he was anti-Semitic, but because he faced no electoral consequences for his frank comments. Furthermore, he sympathized with the human rights plight of the Palestinians as his theology increasingly emphasized social justice and uplifting the poor and oppressed. As his access and influence with Israelis and American Jews declined, Carter drew closer to Palestinian and Arab leaders who welcomed relationships with the former president and to the people of these lands where he wanted to bring social justice.

Despite the deterioration in his relationship with Israelis and American Jews, Carter did not want to be so estranged from Israel, a country that he still maintained a

a former radical firebrand from his Irgun days (p.30), and discussing Olmert’s unwillingness to continue talks until radical Palestinian groups disarm (p.84).

¹⁶³ Chibli Mallat, “Engaging Carter on the ‘one state’ solution in Israel-Palestine,” *The Daily Star (Beirut, Lebanon)*, October 10, 2009.

great affinity for because of his love for the Bible and the modern descendants of the ancient Israelites. To begin repairing that relationship, he sought to repent for potentially hurtful statements to Jewish people everywhere. In December 2009, he used the language of the *al het*, a Jewish prayer for forgiveness on Yom Kippur, to attempt to atone for some of his past brazen statements about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Carter wrote in a statement, “We must recognize Israel’s achievements under difficult circumstances, even as we strive in a positive way to help Israel to continue to improve its relations with its Arab populations, but we must not permit criticisms for improvement to stigmatize Israel.”¹⁶⁴

Despite his attempts to repair his broken relationships with leaders in Israel and in the American Jewish community, most of Carter’s recent activism in the region focused on resolving conflict among the Palestinians themselves. Hamas and Fatah had been fighting since Hamas won the 2006 parliamentary elections and failed to cooperate in issues of governance. The former president negotiated a compromise where the PA would be run by a unity government of nonpartisan technocrats until new presidential and parliamentary elections could be held.¹⁶⁵ Although both sides continued fighting for two more years, Carter’s plan provided the framework for the Egyptian-mediated reconciliation agreement between Fatah and Hamas. Carter lauded the reconciliation agreement as part of the larger “Arab spring” sweeping the region.¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ “Jimmy Carter to US Jews: Forgive me for stigmatizing Israel,” *Ha’aretz*, December 22, 2009.

¹⁶⁵ Farah Stockman, “Carter reprises peacemaker role,” *Tehran Times*, February 1, 2009.

¹⁶⁶ Jimmy Carter, “A partnership that could bring Mideast peace,” *The Star (Amman, Jordan)*, May 9, 2011.

In addition to his work as a negotiator, Carter frequently made humanitarian pleas on behalf of Palestinians in Gaza effectively cut off from the rest of the world, claiming that the “citizens of Gaza are being treated more like animals than human beings” and that assistance would enable Gazans “to be a bridge between modern political life and traditions that date back to the Biblical era.”¹⁶⁷

As of this writing, the Palestinians, weary from the stalled peace process, have sought admission to the United Nations as a full-fledged independent state, a prospect opposed by Israel and the United States. Carter called on the Obama administration not to veto Palestine’s bid in the UN Security Council vote on the matter and permit the UN recognition of Palestine as an independent state in the General Assembly. He counseled Obama that such a decision would have political consequences with American Jewish voters, noting “but I think it’s a price worth paying.”¹⁶⁸ He further urged the administration to use the UN situation as an opportunity to bring the peace process to a conclusion and negotiate the final status issues that will result in an Israeli and a Palestinian state living side-by-side.¹⁶⁹

However, Carter has not really played a significant role in the Obama administration’s attempt to mediate a peaceful resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict outside of writing books and op-eds. Carter has become such a controversial and polarizing figure in the Middle East that the Obama administration hesitated to draw on the former president’s experience and mediation skills. The Obama administration is not

¹⁶⁷ Jimmy Carter, “Gaza must be rebuilt now,” *The Star (Amman, Jordan)*, December 28, 2009; “Gaza: Bombs, missiles, tanks, and bulldozers,” *Tehran Times*, June 23, 2009.

¹⁶⁸ “Carter tells Obama: Don’t veto Palestine’s UN bid,” *Tehran Times*, September 19, 2011.

¹⁶⁹ Jimmy Carter, “After the UN Vote on Palestine,” *International Herald Tribune*, September 13, 2011.

the only party that believes Carter may have outlived his usefulness as a negotiator. One Israeli journalist noted that Carter is interfering in the peace process that is now moving through mediators in Qatar, Egypt, and Turkey.¹⁷⁰

Former president Jimmy Carter, praised for his post-presidential humanitarian accomplishments, lost much of his credibility as an honest broker in the Middle East peace process over the thirty years since he left office. Several factors account for the evolution of Carter's views on Middle East peace that led him to hurt his status as an impartial negotiator: 1) his open sympathy with the Palestinian plight as part of his progressive theological evolution and his opportunities to meet with people he could not meet while president; 2) the absence of political consequences from upset American Jews and other pro-Israel voters; and 3) a lingering feeling of betrayal by Begin on the settlements issue from the Camp David Accords. This chapter also suggests some of the limitations of private actors in diplomacy because Carter relies entirely on persuasion in negotiations and cannot use carrots or sticks to move the process along. Carter himself admits that his advocacy for the peace process and publications like *Palestine: Peace Not Apartheid* "did hurt my nonexistent ability to be a mediator in the Middle East."¹⁷¹ In an interview, Carter claimed "I have moral authority—as long as I don't destroy it," but his actions and writings intended to bring peace to Israel and Palestine seem to have

¹⁷⁰ Amnon Lord, "Jimmy Carter only made things worse: an Israeli view," *The Daily Star* (Beirut, Lebanon), May 5, 2008.

¹⁷¹ Patricia Cohen, "Jimmy Carter the Book Tour (Soon to Be a Major Motion Picture)," *New York Times*, October 11, 2007.

damaged whatever “moral authority” that the former president relied on so much and severely limited his most important tool as a private diplomatic actor: persuasion.¹⁷²

¹⁷² Jonathan Freedland, “I have moral authority,” *Tehran Times*, June 11, 2008.

Chapter 8

CONCLUSION

Twenty-five years after leaving office, Carter wrote a short book entitled *Our Endangered Values* about the contemporary moral and spiritual crises facing the United States. In the book, he examined the roots of the crisis, explaining, “The most important factor is that fundamentalists have become increasingly influential in both religion and government, and have managed to change the nuances and subtleties of historic debate into black-and-white rigidities and the personal derogation of those who dare to disagree.”¹ The former president discussed the Christian Right in the United States as well as Islamic extremist groups in the Middle East to illustrate his argument.

Although he employed the word fundamentalism throughout the book, Carter really identified the phenomenon of religious nationalism described by Mark Juergensmeyer in the mixture between religion and politics. During Carter’s presidency, the rise of religious nationalism in different regions around the world foreshadowed the future conflicts of the post-Cold War world. Religious conflicts and civil wars replaced the American-Soviet superpower competition as the source of international crises.

After many years spent reflecting on his presidency, Carter finally understood and explained the common bonds among the Christian Right in the United States, the Shia supporters of Khomeini’s Islamic republic in Iran, the religious elements of the Likud coalition, and the Muslim fighters of the Afghan mujahidin. In an interview following his Nobel Peace Prize lecture, Carter described the tremendous dangers of fundamentalism:

¹ Jimmy Carter, *Our Endangered Values: America’s Moral Crisis* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2005), 3.

Increasingly, true believers are inclined to begin a process of deciding: “Since I am aligned with God, I am superior and my beliefs should prevail, and anyone who disagrees with me is inherently wrong,” and the next step is “inherently inferior.” The ultimate step is “subhuman,” and then their lives are not significant.²

Despite his description of the danger of mixing fundamentalist religion and politics, Carter admitted, “my own religious beliefs have been inextricably entwined with the political principles I have adopted.”³ Longtime friend and biographer Peter Bourne described that Carter’s religious background made the “globalization of his personal concern” seem “natural.”⁴ While serving as president, Carter proactively used his faith with some success in the negotiations between Egypt and Israel. However, he did not find the same success in applying his religious convictions in reacting to the outbreak of religious nationalist conflicts and tensions in Iran, Afghanistan, and the United States.

Scholars pointed to a variety of reasons for Carter’s difficulties and failures in applying his religion to his policymaking. Political scientist Gary Scott Smith explained, “[he] initially underestimated the extent to which moral values clash, advisors disagree, facts are unclear, and events occur that even a powerful nation has little ability to control.”⁵ Religion scholar Richard Hutcheson emphasized three major religious themes of Carter’s presidency that carried negative political consequences in the post-Watergate,

² As cited in Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, 30-31.

³ Carter, *Our Endangered Values*, 5-6.

⁴ Peter Bourne, *Jimmy Carter: A Comprehensive Biography from Plains to Post-Presidency* (New York: Scribner, 1997), 383.

⁵ Gary Scott Smith, *Faith and the Presidency: From George Washington to George W. Bush* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 324.

post-Vietnam United States: “a consciousness of sin and humility,” “sacrifice,” and “an ethical awareness which saw the complexities of all moral decisions.”⁶

Carter also had trouble articulating to American and international audiences how his religious values translated into a coherent policy vision. Reverend Theodore Hesburgh, president of Notre Dame University, wrote following Carter’s defeat, “I have always had the feeling that he is a good man, but somehow was not able to bring his vision to reality. That is not unusual on this earth.”⁷ Compared to other presidents, Carter may not have called upon the tradition of American civil religion as often, but the words of the Bible and his faith deeply permeated his worldview. Historian Leo Ribuffo explained, “Perhaps because he was so pious, Carter felt little need for official declarations of piety.”⁸

Rather than serving as a priest for the American civil religion, Carter frequently employed religious rhetoric in jeremiads, such as the famous “Crisis of Confidence” speech.⁹ As a result, many Americans misunderstood or rejected Carter’s faith and the role it played in his politics. Religious liaison Robert Maddox later told an interviewer, “[Carter’s] humility translated as weakness.” He continued, “[Carter] could say, ‘I made a mistake,’ and feel as he would when personally confessing a sin to God. He could

⁶ Richard G. Hutcheson, *God in the White House: How Religion Has Changed the Modern Presidency* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1988), 137.

⁷ As cited in Douglas Brinkley, “The Rising Stock of Jimmy Carter: The ‘Hands on’ Legacy of Our Thirty-ninth President,” *Diplomatic History* 20:4 (Fall 1996), 506. Hesburgh’s comment was a response to a survey administered by Kenneth Kline, a political analyst interested in why Carter’s fortunes fell so much from 1976 to 1980.

⁸ Leo P. Ribuffo, “God and Jimmy Carter,” in *Transforming Faith: The Sacred and Secular in Modern American History*, ed. M.L. Bradbury and James B. Gilbert (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1989), 151.

⁹ See Kevin Mattson, *“What the Heck Are You Up To, Mr. President?” Jimmy Carter, America’s “Malaise,” and the Speech That Should Have Changed the Country* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2009).

confess to the American people, ‘I made a mistake,’ but the American people perceived that as weakness and wishy-washiness.”¹⁰

Without the restraints of the American political system, Carter’s extensive and sometimes controversial post-presidential activism provided a window into what matters most to the former president such as making peace, fighting disease, and alleviating poverty. Hendrik Hertzberg, a former Carter speechwriter, remarked, “What a post-presidency can do though is to illuminate which aspects of a president’s character were real and which were phony. All of [Carter’s] strengths: perseverance, dedication, integrity, those have all turned out to be very, very real.”¹¹ Journalist Chris Matthews, another former Carter speechwriter, reflected, “Carter is like the patient investor who sits on the same portfolio for years and suddenly finds himself rich. Carter’s stocks have names like ‘human rights’ and ‘Camp David’ and ‘environment’ marked on them.”¹²

Carter’s post-presidential humanitarian efforts illustrate how his strong belief in the separation of church and state and his Christian realism tempered his strong evangelical convictions in his policymaking calculus during his presidency. Carter explained the differences between his presidential policymaking and post-presidential activism in Niebuhrian terms, “When I was president of the United States I could not deal with foreign countries on the basis of sacrificial love. I would have been impeached had I always exhibited as president that high a standard.”¹³

¹⁰ Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 138-139.

¹¹ *American Experience: Jimmy Carter*, PBS Transcript, http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/amex/carter/filmmore/pt_2.html

¹² Chris Matthews, “Tijuana Habitat,” *San Francisco Examiner*, August 19, 1990.

¹³ As cited in Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 144.

The religious nationalist issues Carter faced as president persist in different guises in the present. The former president remained actively involved in seeking a comprehensive peace settlement in the Middle East between Israel and its Arab neighbors, with mixed results. Even after gaining a retrospective understanding of fundamentalism, Carter still found himself embroiled in controversy with his decision to meet with the leaders of Hamas, a Palestinian religious nationalist group.

Compared to his ongoing involvement in Israel and the Palestinian territories, Carter remained largely uninvolved in Iran and Afghanistan. However, the conflicts and crises in these countries from the years of his presidency still reverberate. Many Americans still perceive Iran through the lens of the Carter years and the 444-day long hostage crisis. The Afghan mujahidin, with CIA support, served as a training ground for the future leaders of al Qaeda and other contemporary Islamist terrorist organizations.

Following Carter's loss in the 1980 election, the Christian Right became an even more influential fixture in Republican politics over the course of the next three decades. In fact, the public prominence of the Christian Right narrowed the definition of evangelicalism so that it precluded an identity of evangelical liberalism.¹⁴

Much like Job, Jimmy Carter displayed remarkable patience in enduring challenges from religious nationalists at home and abroad as well as a host of other crises. His religious convictions not only provided stability and comfort in these times of trial, but they also clearly affected his worldview and decision-making, even if his strong

¹⁴ See Randall Balmer, *Thy Kingdom Come: How the Religious Right Distorts the Faith and Threatens America—An Evangelical's Lament* (New York: Basic Books, 2006); David R. Swartz, *Moral Minority: The Evangelical Left in an Age of Conservatism* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012).

belief in separation of church and state made its effect seem more subtle. Former Carter Press Secretary Jody Powell recalled,

There were no times when I recall that he invoked his religious beliefs as reasons for a decision, and I would have been not only surprised but shocked and put off if he had. But...my view of him is that his religion and his faith were so much an integral part of him, and how he viewed the world and how he viewed other people and how he viewed his responsibilities, both as a citizen and as a president, that it's a seamless thing.¹⁵

Carter's religious beliefs helped him achieve a stunning diplomatic success at Camp David. However, his success there raised expectations among his advisors and the general public when it came to negotiating with the Ayatollah to release the hostages or pursuing a sufficiently anticommunist and pro-Israel foreign policy to please members of the Christian Right. In his Bible classes before and after his presidency, Carter often reminded his listeners of Jesus' teachings on humility, a lesson he learned in his failures coping with religious nationalists in Israel, Iran, Afghanistan, the United States, and the Palestinian territories.¹⁶

¹⁵ As cited in Hutcheson, *God in the White House*, 135.

¹⁶ For collections and excerpts of Carter's long career of teaching Sunday School and his emphasis on the aforementioned topic of humility and pride, see Wesley G. Pippert, *The Spiritual Journey of Jimmy Carter: In His Own Words* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co, 1978); Jimmy Carter, *Sources of Strength: Meditations on Scripture for a Living Faith* (New York: Times Books, 1997); Jimmy Carter, *Through the Year with Jimmy Carter: 366 Daily Meditations from the 39th President* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2011); Jimmy Carter, *NIV Lessons from Life Bible: Personal Reflections with Jimmy Carter* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012).

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